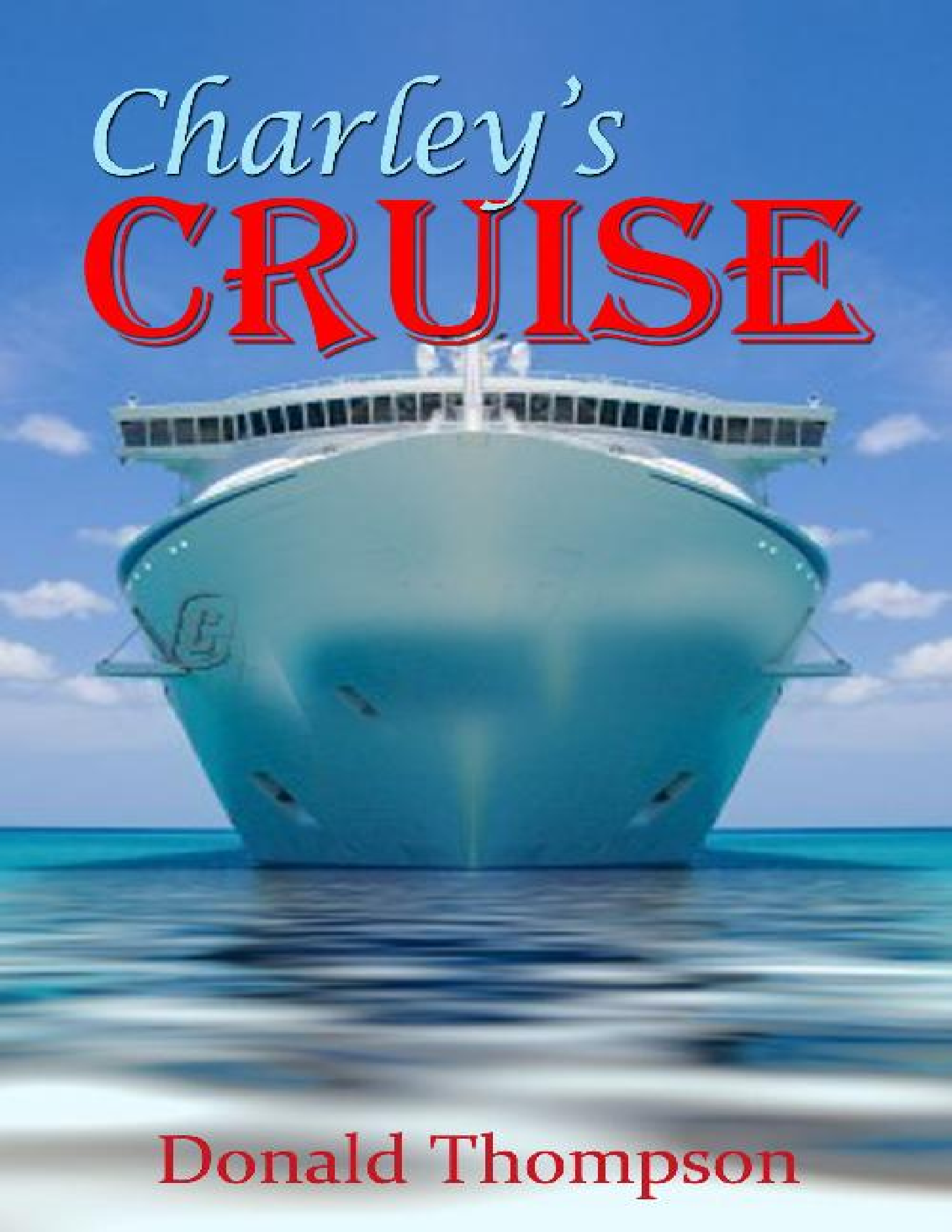
Charley's
CRUISE
Donald Thompson

CHARLEYS WAR

Donald Thompson

This is a work of fiction. As in all fiction the characters and insights are based

On the authors experience, and all names, characters, locales and events are

either products of the author's imagination or used in a fictional context

CHAPTER 1—FEUDIN' AND FIGHTIN'

The two women thrashed around on the slick floor in a major hair-pulling exhibition, twisting and clawing, fire in their eyes, expletives bleeped. The small band of onlookers seated in a semicircle around the struggling pair made no attempt to separate them until one locked her flashing, white teeth onto the fleshy earlobe of the other. The studio audience went wild, some spilling into the aisles, pressing toward the stage. As for me, I reached for the remote, having just overdosed on what passes for afternoon TV entertainment for bored housewives and the after-school crowd

How come a forty-one-year old guy like me watches daytime television? You have to go back four years and it's a long story. I grew up in Brooklyn, my father a NYPD cop who did a full Forty with the department. After a couple of dead-end jobs, three years later at my father's urging I graduated from the police academy and took my place on the streets as a uniformed cop.

They say there are days when your life changes forever. One of mine was a dreary winter morning when the squad room was brightened by the presence of Melanie Foxx, a slight, five-foot-eight redhead with soft, expressive eyes starting as a dispatcher. Like me she had drifted into police work. An only child, after

graduating from high school her mother moved on to greener pastures with the local ward heeler. This left the rest of her upbringing to her father who worked for some forty years in the shipyards. Using his connections as a shop steward he helped her get her present position, which was extremely important because he died shortly thereafter. After the funeral she had taken care of his gambling debts, now facing the prospect of slowly reducing the balance of the mortgage on the modest brownstone in which she had lived all her life. When my parents retired to Florida, loneliness if nothing else brought us together, and it was no surprise when we took our marriage vows at St. Finbar's the following spring. The reception followed with soggy pizza and draft beer at a cop bar. The guys wanted to hire a stripper, but in deference to Mel it was downgraded to a drink 'till you drop affair, where everyone joined my dad in signing their names on a piece of beer-stained butcher paper. I have it to this day.

After the wedding I moved in and clean-up, fix-up and paint-up dragged on turning months into years, largely funded out of an unexpected windfall—a cash settlement from a mesothelioma class-action lawsuit stemming from Mel's father's past employment that was thoughtfully filed on our behalf by some attorney in Wyoming. What else did I do with my life? I started attending City College at night and nine years later after a lot of studying on the subway they finally threw me out with a degree in English and a minor in Psychology. Right after graduation I considered becoming a high school English teacher—but dropped that idea when the kids started bringing guns to school.

Before we realized it sixteen years had passed largely with job-related socializing: weddings, christenings, vacations and retirements. Our family ties were limited to my folks, which were minimal because I was born to a couple who emigrated from Ireland and who uncharacteristically had no other offspring.

Finally, we decided to give up our careers in law enforcement. Normally, couples hired in entry-level positions are not free to

make such decisions. Sure, we'd have to look for jobs, but what made this all possible was the settlement from Mel's father's death had more than doubled through investments. Three weeks after bidding my fellow cops farewell at the same bar where we celebrated our wedding, we drank a toast to yet another major cash infusion, from a pair of stressed-out Yuppies with matching smart phones who closed on the now mortgage-free and seriously upgraded brownstone we had inherited. The following day on a sparkling clear morning early in September we aimed our aging Camry southward, headed for the land of sunshine, mouse ears, space launches and aging seniors—Florida! The U-Haul trailer dragging behind proclaimed to the motoring public another "Adventure in Moving" was in progress.

Heading for the New Jersey flatlands I watched the shimmering twin towers of the World Trade Center slowly recede in the rear view mirror. I wondered if I would ever see them again.

CHAPTER 2—SLEEPY TIME DOWN SOUTH

Traveling from North to South I have always wondered where one leaves off and the other begins. I'm not talking about geography, I'm talking about values and lifestyle. As I dodged gear-grinding eighteen wheelers careening down I-95 I asked Mel to be on the lookout for signs we had exchanged Union Blue for Confederate Gray. Reaching Virginia, even though we were approaching the stomping grounds of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Robert E. Lee, and enough Confederate generals to keep the Union army busy for four long years, the steady stream of housing developments and strip malls as far south as Richmond didn't evoke anything vaguely reminiscent of *Gone With the Wind*. The scattered farms and green stretches somehow seemed out of place, more decorative than functional, munching cattle a nice afterthought. We had left the North, but we still hadn't reached the South, we were in some sort of no-man's land in between.

It’s said the whirring of a butterfly's wings in China can generate a typhoon in the Pacific. For us, it all started at the Florida welcome center with its tired windblown palm trees that materialized like a mirage in the shimmering heat waves, where I finally had to abandon the Camry-cum-trailer in the truckers’ parking lot. But, things went from bad to worse when we lined up in front of the perky attendant

filling small paper cups from a colorful juice dispenser, visibly annoyed by my inability to supply an immediate answer to the cheery inquiry: “Orange or grapefruit?” After polling my spouse, I falteringly replied, “Orange for me. Grapefruit for my wife.” From the glares of those in line I inferred somehow my indecision had negatively impacted an attempt by the state to enhance its image to tourists—a no-no of apparently significant proportions. I decided to redeem myself by feigning interest in the literature racks, to be followed by a strategic retreat to the friendlier confines of the busy parking lot. Idly I picked up a colorful brochure loudly proclaiming: "Find Paradise on Earth." Nestled within an artistically balanced set of thumbnail photos depicting the publicized aspects of Florida resort life was copy calculated to attract the attention of even the most jaded residential prospects:

Experience the thrill...of a sunset...a twisting, birdie putt... your first sailfish…point, set and match! Carved out of the tropical blue waters of the Atlantic, Paradise Cay offers unparalleled ocean views from any of our award-winning restaurants and shopping to satisfy your every need. Members tee off for championship golf in a links setting catering to the needs of players of all ability levels. Covered storage at the on-site marina and moonlight dances at the poolside clubhouse are only part of the many upbeat activities for residents of Paradise Cay, Florida's most complete, gated five-star island resort community. Play where you live. Live where you play: IN PARADISE!!!"

“What’s so interesting?" Mel asked, appropriating my reading matter and studying the route detailed on the brochure's map, not drawn to scale. "Sounds pretty expensive," I replied in my most calculated, disarming manner, hoping this might dampen her enthusiasm and give me time to merchandise some of the alternatives I hastily bundled together.

Retreating to the parking lot, after what seemed an eternity unsuccessfully trying to extricate myself from the three parking spaces I had appropriated, one of the truckers observing my plight decided enough was enough and gave me a short lesson in the art of backing up. "It's very simple," he explained. "Left is right, and right is left. Just turn the wheel in the opposite direction and don't oversteer." Finally he took pity on me and in a deft series of maneuvers aimed us southward once again, to derisive applause from his buddies watching. With Mel still clutching the Paradise Cay brochure I knew immediately where we were headed.

More than two hundred miles later, after running the gauntlet of billboards touting everything from fast food to alligator wrestling, we found ourselves at an impressive palm tree-lined causeway leading to an elongated offshore barrier island, seeming to rise out of the very ocean. A turreted tower-like structure dominated the modest skyline, evoking images of the Magic Kingdom. Marveling at the laxity of the area's building codes, I quietly speculated about what impact fabled Southeastern hurricanes might have on the planned nature of the community's activities.

Eagerly awaiting Mel's reaction I knew we were in for trouble when she exuded, "Charley, it's just like a fairy tale. Who knows, it might be our fairy tale!" Sometimes Mel talks like this. That's just the way she is and after more than fifteen years I'm used to it. Having seen the advertised prices of the oceanfront communities on our way down the coastal highway, I thought—fat chance! Uneasy about the wind and waves splashing against the sea wall and depositing a salty residue on the windshield, I drove slowly down the landscaped approach road to be greeted by a roly-poly little man in a theme park uniform. His

ample midsection poorly contained by a bulging blue and white uniform shirt replete with sergeant's stripes, he challenged our vehicle in a manner that suggested retired military. "What business do you have in Paradise?"

Resisting the temptation to hit him with one of my patented smart-ass answers, I let Mel provide a conciliatory but potentially disturbing response. "We are the Adamses, here to look at retirement property. Is there someone who can show us around?" The little man positively beamed, leading me to believe prospective property buyers were near the top of the list of persons to be treated in a civil and courteous manner. Unhesitatingly he plucked a cell phone from his belt and speed-dialed a number, presumably to someone in the marketing profession. At the same time he punched a button and the red and white entry barrier majestically rose skyward.

He waved us into the parking lot where I abandoned the Camry in three spaces, deciding I could worry later about how to reverse the process. St. Peter bore the cross—I had the U-Haul. We soon heard the distant sound of a gasoline engine growing progressively louder and shortly materializing in the form of a svelte, silken pants-suited, raven haired beauty of indeterminate years, one hand cradling a cell phone, the other gripping the undersized steering wheel of a shiny coral and turquoise four-person golf cart. It was decked out with recessed headlights, tinted windshield, plush padded seats and a fringed color-coordinated canopy. In a maneuver far better suited to the ski slopes than a sand-slick parking lot, she skidded to a halt and leapt out, right hand extended in a gesture that told me the natives were indeed friendly.

“I’m Madeline Gaines, my friends call me Elf, and I’m your sales consultant. But the only selling here is done by Paradise Cay itself! Come with me and discover for yourself the wonders of Florida's friendliest, most modern, self-contained resort community.” Foot poised over the accelerator, she timed its jerky departure to the exact moment we settled back in its plush, padded rear seat. With a squealing of miniature tires sporting shiny silver wheel covers we

were underway, our tour guide steering with one hand while she speed dialed her cell phone with the other. We were now firmly ensnarled in Elf's Spider Woman clutches, and there was no turning back.

Our whirlwind tour of the island's retail, service and maintenance sectors ended abruptly at the center of the inner core, at the base of the Abigail Jones Observatory. Looking up I realized this monolithic structure towering above the surrounding buildings was what gave the island its Disney World-like appearance when viewed from afar. After chasing Elf up the endless stairs we arrived at the small observation deck at the top, uneasy that there was nothing underneath. While we enjoyed the view she launched into something suspiciously like a canned sales presentation laced with leading questions searching for clues as to our net worth and possible interest in resort property. Learning that I was formerly a big-city cop seemed to take her aback, probably because she would be on the low side in guessing our bank balance. Cell phone glued to her ear she headed back down the stairs, and back on terra firma she started reciting the prices and membership fees attached to home and condo ownership, all well beyond our budget. Finally, receiving a call on her cell phone she excused herself to head off for a private conversation that lasted long enough for Mel to recite all the reasons why Paradise Cay was not for us.

When our tour guide returned I knew her bubbling camaraderie would quickly disappear with the realization that she just lost two hot prospects. I was dead wrong, as after consulting the diamond-accented silver watch nestled amidst the jangling array of bracelets girding her tanned left wrist, she started, "It's getting late and how could I have been so inconsiderate? I haven't given you time to think. Fortunately there's not a management development group using the conference center and we would like you to stay tonight in one of our finest executive suites, compliments of Paradise Cay, with no obligation whatsoever. And, of course this includes dinner in our five-star restaurant above the clubhouse," she added looking suggestively in the direction of her transportation.

Looking at Mel, I knew the pot was now sweetened to the point we couldn't say no, and shortly thereafter we found ourselves in front of the sprawling conference center, bombarded by the scent of tropical blooms thriving under the massive glass canopy shielding visitors from the elements. A bellman suddenly appeared to herd us through the twists and turns of the velvet ropes leading to Express Check-in, with Trish Holifield our Service Associate. Tall and regal in her smartly tailored corporate uniform she was the most startlingly beautiful woman I had ever met. Her natural elegance was heightened by the parentheses of the clipped blonde tresses framing a china doll face, delicate features with full pouting lips, wide-set clear blue eyes, and a broad smile showing off perfect teeth. Subtle understated makeup projected twenty-something radiance but I guessed she was past the dreaded three-nought.

With a soft, suggestive Southern lilt to her voice, gaze locked on mine she purred, "Welcome to the Susan B. Jones Conference Center, a permanent memorial to developer Emlyn Aubrey Jones' tragically stillborn daughter. My job is to make your stay here as pleasant as possible, and if there is anything at all I can do, just let me know." With the light flashing off her highly polished fingernails she reached for a bulging folder addressed in stylish computer font to "Mr. and Mrs. Adams." As spontaneous as Ms. Baines offer of food and lodging for the night might have seemed, it appeared our spur-of-the-moment decision to accept had not been totally unanticipated, leaving me with the disquieting thought: appearances to the contrary, very few things happened at Paradise Cay purely by chance.

Executive Suite A-1 clearly lived up to its rating, one window wall providing an impressive view of the coastline disappearing in the haze, while the other looked over the clustered watercraft tied up around the marina, a colorful, expensive sea of flags, masts, outriggers, antennas and electronic gear gently rocking with the tide. After dismissing our bellman, Frederick, with a ten-spot, Mel suggested that we do nothing for a while, and then take them up on their offer of a free dinner.

We finally found the restaurant that was located on the second floor of the clubhouse jointly serving the social and recreational needs of the island community. We were immediately led to a table with a “reserved” sign, the floor-to-ceiling windows affording us a sweeping view of Paradise Cay Golf Links fading into the sand dunes. Wallowing in the enveloping softness of the leather swivel chairs, fresh flowers, and elegant place settings, I looked up to see Frederick reincarnated in the form of an attentive waiter, resplendent in a tailored jacket in corporate’s team colors, stylishly offset by tuxedo black trousers with razor creases.

Unable to rein in my smart-ass mouth I had to remark, “Seems like no time since you were fitted out for an African safari, and now you show up looking like Fred Astaire tripping into a dance routine.” The puzzled expression that briefly crossed his face told me my attempt at humor might not have bridged the generational gap, but with a broad grin, he explained, “I work here when there’s nothing at the conference center. I was on the way out the door with my surfboard when they asked me to take care of you guys, guess they wanted to give you the full treatment.” After assuring us the tab would be taken care of by our door key, with Fred’s help we put together a truly memorable dinner, leaving a cash tip that would have covered our dinner out on the highway, further evidence we could hardly take care of the people with their hands out, let alone cope with the up-front outlays.

Contentedly contemplating memories of the elaborate, multi-course meal, as the twilight shadows deepened we took a brief sightseeing jaunt around the island, at the same time contemplating the decidedly scandalous prospect of both occupying the oversized coral Jacuzzi tub in a bright mirrored niche in the master bathroom of our commodious lodgings. It was later when we were preparing to immerse ourselves in its overheated, roiling waters we noticed the steady blinking red light on the wall phone—a disquieting reminder we were not exactly strangers in Paradise. Mashing the largest button activated an ear-piercing tone followed by the cultured, well-modulated tones of none other than “Em” Jones

himself, asking that I meet him at seven a.m., the Horizon Grill, to discuss “a confidential matter of mutual concern.”

“These guys really go all out when it comes to selling property,” I said, “and the boss man will probably give me a ten percent-off coupon or something, that I will promise to consider seriously *after* I’ve got them to throw in a free round on the great links-style course.”

“I’m afraid ten percent won’t hack it, but I think your buddy Em has something in mind other than selling us an overpriced condo. Besides, we have more important things to think about right now.”

As usual, on both counts, it turned out Mel was absolutely right.

CHAPTER 3—MISTER JONES

After an uneven night's sleep interrupted more than once by contemplation of the disquieting implications of Mr. Jones message, I finally awoke to the alarm clock and the early-morning sounds of the island community. Donning the three piece suit with the wide lapels that had almost ended up at Goodwill, I left for my date with destiny.

I was becoming concerned I had gone to the wrong place when I sensed someone coming up the stairs. I turned to face a tall, thin man, deeply tanned, athletic and well-conditioned, wearing a jogging suit. Despite his casual attire he carried himself with dignity—like an investment banker out for a morning run. If first impressions mean anything I took an instant liking to the guy, his even features softened by an engaging smile, with his obvious health, physical condition and vitality belying his fifty-five years, at least that was his age in the "Paradise is People" brochure. Pushing back a lock of black hair from his forehead he apologetically introduced himself as my host, asking me had I been waiting long.

"No, I just got here," I lied. "Thanks for the tour and putting us up in the conference center. If this is how you treat all your guests I'm surprised it's not full all the time…." I said, voice trailing off uncertainly.

"No it isn't, but sixty-four percent weekday occupancy isn't bad," he replied pleasantly, at the same time fumbling for a key which he used to let us into the restaurant. Pausing at a door artfully concealed at the far end of the back wall I followed him into what he explained was his private dining room. Dominated by an elegant oval conference table, its highly polished surface glistened from the spotlights he turned on,

Mr. Jones poured us two cups of decaf coffee from a carafe on the service bar and we went the small talk route until two waiters arrived laden down with serving dishes, shiny silver covers raised momentarily to expose their contents, a distinct contrast to the orange juice and yogurt they deposited in front of my host.

“Go ahead, dig in, I imagine you’re worn out by the high-energy introduction to Paradise Cay. That’s not my style. You’ll find me a man of few words. I try to make them all count. I assume you are wondering why I asked you to meet me today?” I nodded, my curiosity thoroughly aroused.

“I apologize for the answering machine message. Wouldn’t have blamed you for ignoring it altogether,” he continued in an outwardly friendly manner. “Ms. Baines says you have experience as a big-city cop?” With distinct interest his penetrating brown eyes engaged mine—a quick transition from relaxed and friendly to focused and businesslike.

“You are correct,” I admitted. Still anticipating I might be a candidate for a low-key, high-level sales pitch, I hastened to add an appropriate disclaimer. “I put in sixteen years as a New York City cop, but I retired as a sergeant and for the last ten years I pushed paper. I don’t want you to think I was like the street cops on television or the high powered detectives in drug shootemups. I was just another guy in the system, putting in my time. With a couple of cash windfalls we decided to relocate and I anticipate getting back in the job market. We should be able to live comfortably but nothing remotely like the way you folks live here in Paradise Cay.” Having noted his apparent preoccupation with short, focused communication, I decided I had already used more than enough verbiage to make my point.

“Don’t worry, I’m not trying to sell you anything, at least not real estate,” he added cryptically. “Tell me, what do you think of the rentacops who bill me each month for what they call resident security?”

“Rentacops…?” I repeated thoughtfully, stalling for time. It shouldn’t have, but his question caught me completely off-guard. Deciding honesty was the best policy, I continued. “My only contact has been with the funny little man at the gate.” Before proceeding I considered briefly whether Mr. Jones the Second was ready for my smart-ass brand of humor. I decided to try him out. “I

haven’t seen a uniform like that since my last visit to Disney World. But, I guess he has hidden virtues, like he works cheap.”

I was pleased to see the tension lines on my host’s face soften as he came very close to laughing out loud. Having apparently made up his mind, he abruptly opened the snaps on his briefcase and extracted a bulging yellow manila folder, sliding it across the table in my direction. “Mr. Adams, I’m already late for my next appointment, but I would like to ask a favor of you. This is my complete and very confidential file on Coastal Services. Sad to state, this is the company handling our security. If you agree, I want you to spend the next couple of hours studying its contents.” In an obvious attempt to remain on schedule his final remarks accompanied the closing of his briefcase. “Then I’d like you to meet me at noon at my office for lunch to share your observations. For this needed service I will be happy to pay you five hundred dollars, and be genuinely grateful.”

His penetrating glance told me he expected an immediate, no-nonsense answer.

Sensing that Mr. Jones was a man of action rather than words, and emboldened by the apparent rapport I had established with Paradise Cay’s head honcho, perhaps a bit too flippantly I replied, “Mr. Jones. You’ve got yourself a deal!”

My host’s sudden departure lowered the tension level considerably and I made haste to assemble a sampler of southern breakfast fare while I opened the folder.

Nothing much caught my eye until I came upon reports involving missing equipment and supplies from the electrical shop, with sloppy records-keeping more likely than theft as a cause for the shortages. I also found a report from the auditors relative to discrepancies in the liquor inventory, not uncommon when employees are given access to booze and cash at the same time.

I also noted a great many different signatures, often illegible, appended to the so-called Incidence Reports. This suggested either there was an unexplainably large security force, or there was a great deal of turnover. From the reports it appeared most complaints were eventually resolved in person or over the telephone. Only a very few were handled in writing. Scanning the distinctly ungrammatical replies I decided that was probably a very wise decision.

Closing the file, it just didn't make sense. What could there be in this disorganized mass of paperwork to warrant high-level executive scrutiny—let alone pay good money for me to scrutinize its contents?

Returning to A-1 Executive suite I found Mel up and about organizing our suitcases. Not sure where my buddy Em was coming from I left out the details and started, "I guess because I was a cop for a while Mr. Jones wanted me to look at a dusty old file about his security service. And when we meet at noon he's going to pay me five hundred bucks just for my opinion." Flying across the room to grip me in an enthusiastic embrace, my wife looked up at me, her eyes shining. "Honey, I can't believe it! Maybe this is the start of a second career as a high-paid security consultant!" I assured her this was most unlikely.

With more than two hours until my luncheon appointment, I settled down in the padded recliner facing the big screen television. Having been up at the crack of dawn and coming down from the emotional high from the meeting, I drifted off.

Mel let me sleep.

CHAPTER 4—MANNA FROM HEAVEN

The return trip left me with just enough time to find Mr. Jones' office suite and present myself to his secretary, sculptured hairdo and strategically applied makeup masking a surprisingly plain woman, fiftyish, aloof and outwardly unfriendly. Pushing one of several buttons on her phone she gestured in the direction of a polished dark-grained door noiselessly swinging open on well-oiled hinges. If Mr. Jones was a man of few words, his secretary was a woman of even fewer.

His change of clothing was now more consistent with the quietly conservative image I had of a millionaire developer. At that point Frederick arrived with a bowl of crab claws and some rolls still warm from the oven. I fished out a plateful while my host started forthrightly, "I'm sure you must be wondering how we know so much about you. It's very simple. Security has always been the weakest part of my organization. I've been thinking about hiring my own director for quite some time. Newspaper ads and employment agencies struck out so I asked Mrs. Baines to be on the lookout for a likely candidate. She may run on, but she's no fool. A few minutes small talk gave her enough information to call me and I decided you were worth a longer look. It wasn't difficult. A private investigator I had used before quickly filled me in with everything I needed to know. That's why we're here today. So, tell me, what do you think of security at Paradise Cay?"

Surprised by the directness of his approach I had no choice other than to start earning my five hundred big ones. Having downplayed my expertise earlier in the day, I decided it was probably best to proceed like I knew what I was talking about.

I started confidently, "Mr. Jones, your security operation is very different than anything I'm familiar with. It follows very little in the way of standard police procedure. This is both good…and… bad" I offered, with slight pauses for dramatic effect and to collect my thoughts. "It's good because your residential community has a distinct character all its own, reflected in many of your operational policies. The flip side is that even in Paradise you cannot escape

the realities of law." I paused momentarily to gauge his reaction, thinking could this really be *me* talking? When there was no response, I forged bravely ahead. "Most of your file is concerned with the seemingly trivial, but, in fact, important problems people face in living together. The majority were handled courteously and effectively. Where you should feel less secure is with the handling of non-routine matters with serious financial and legal overtones, for example, the continuing discrepancies in your liquor inventory and electrical supplies. It was only when I reached the bottom of your file it dawned on me why you might have questions about the entire operation. Simply stated, you get what you pay for. Coastal Services may be a cost-effective source for day-to-day security personnel, but the real problem is at the top. Wage levels here may be lower than in the big cities but I can't believe anyone with the necessary training and experience to fill the head job would be willing to work for the salary Coastal pays him." Having totally exhausted any further coherent thoughts I waited for Mr. Jones to make the next move.

"Mr. Adams," he answered directly, at the same time leaning forward in his seat. "You have hit the nail right on the head. I couldn't have stated my concerns any better. I'll put my cards on the table. I've realized for a long time I needed to take charge of the situation by putting someone experienced and competent on my payroll. Would you have any interest in coming on board as Chief of Security?"

I was literally flabbergasted, not only by the offer, but with how fast my host made decisions. Even though Mel and I had talked in general terms about gainful employment once we were settled in the South, I hadn't had time to think of it as a real possibility. It hadn't dawned on me until just then that Mr. Jones was seriously considering me as a job candidate. Thinking—nothing ventured, nothing gained—I put on my bold face and addressed his question with calculated confidence, at the same time trying to downplay any interest I might have in the proposal.

“Mr. Jones, I am truly flattered by your offer when I was just starting to enjoy a badly needed vacation. All I can say is if you give me some idea of what you might have in mind I will take it to my good wife, where I warn you it will be put under the microscope.” I was glad my hands were out of sight under the table as it suddenly came to me—they were trembling!

Reaching into the recesses of his tailored jacket he produced a small voice recorder that he used to compose a memo, seemingly an employment offer and job description rolled into one. The pay could have been higher, but the offer of a free condo made it much more inviting. While we continued digging into the stone crabs his secretary typed the memo and after he signed it he gave me a copy, along with a key to Number Ten Sailfish Lane, that he said was the condo that went with the position.

When we reached the bottom of the bowl, Mr. Jones secretary buzzed with an incoming call from the Middle East. Taking this as a cue to end our meeting, I thanked Mr. Jones for his time and made a hasty departure.

Not only did I have a job offer, but it also included a free condo in an exclusive gated community. Almost too good to be true, just like manna from heaven!

"Manna. n. 1. Anything badly needed that comes unexpectedly...."

Returning home it took a while to convince Mel that I took Mr. Jones offer seriously, but it was only when we visited the furnished condo that she came on board, although the five hundred bucks up front was also in the mix. For me the clincher was we would have full access to all Paradise Cay recreational and support facilities, including the clubhouse, fitness center, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts, *and* Paradise Cay Golf Links.

When I arrived at the administration building I ran into the humorless Ms. Watson on her way to the employees’ parking lot. Respecting her aversion to oral communication, without comment I

offered her Number Ten's key, to be told, "You can give it to Mr. Jones. He's waiting for you." Arriving at the heavy glass doors leading to the executive suite I was surprised to find the door to Mr. Jones' private office open. Spying me in the doorway he quickly rose from his desk, hand extended in greeting. It didn't take him long to get down to business. "What do you think?" he asked casually, I assumed in a calculated effort to put me at ease. "Well, Sir," I added in a gesture of respect, "to be honest I am leaning in the direction of accepting your offer. But, I do have a few concerns. For starters what police powers would I have?"

After considering my question briefly, he began. "That's something you will have to take up with Sheriff Perkins. I'm free to hire you on the spot to manage my property interests. This won't give you much in the way of actual authority. But, it won't take long to get you armed and certified as a sheriff's deputy, actually it was the sheriff's idea."

"That's fine with me," I agreed. Pausing momentarily I uneasily phrased a question I had told Mel I would ask. "New subject. Not to be negative but what happens if things don't work out?" My host reached for a legal folder neatly centered on his expansive desk. "That's not a problem. There's a clause saying we owe each other thirty days advance notice if either of us wishes to terminate the agreement. And, in that event, you have an additional fifteen days to vacate the premises. By the way, what did you think of the condo?"

Having no essential disagreement with the termination options, the only real concern I had before the meeting, I continued with the small talk route. "The condo is fine...just fine. Both my wife and I were impressed how completely it was furnished and how attractively it was decorated."

"Not surprising," he exclaimed. "Number Ten used to be the model home for the Palmdale subdivision, a very desirable location and close to your office. That should tell you I'm really serious as this has been on my mind for quite some time."

He sat there patiently while I read the entire document. Signing it on the bottom line above the pre-notarized signature block I knew would make me the newest member of the Paradise Cay family. Finally, with steady hand I penned my name, and with a firm handshake to seal the bargain, my new boss handed me back the brass key. Number Ten and the title, Chief of Security, were officially mine!

“I want to welcome you to our corporate group, Charley, and please, it’s Em. Drop by tomorrow morning and Andrea will prepare the paperwork to put you on the payroll immediately. This will give you the weekend to get settled, and it will also give me time to have the present occupant vacate your office. I hope you don’t expect a big pre-employment conference. That’s not my style,” he concluded, at the same time rising. Coming to my feet I wondered whether this signaled the end of our meeting, but something about his manner told me he was not finished.

“Don’t think you’ll be left hanging when it comes to knowing how this place works and what’s going on,” he continued reassuringly. “You’ll be given a password allowing full access to the data base, including personnel records, real estate, sales and marketing, everything but the most sensitive financial information. Every Tuesday morning, eight a.m. sharp we meet in my private dining room for breakfast and a staff meeting. My wife and I have a nine a.m. tee time in the couples’ weekly tournament so this forces us to conclude our business in less than an hour. And, that’s way too long, anyway,” he noted, shaking his head slowly.

Thanking him for his time and courtesy, I turned to leave. “And, one more thing. You may wonder why I haven’t filled you in on the key people around here. You can figure out who’s who from the organization chart. But, when it comes to the people who work for me I want you to form your own opinions. While I expect loyalty from my employees, I don’t expect them always to agree with me. Above all—keep your eyes open. Things around here aren’t always what they seem. There are undercurrents, can’t really put my finger

on them. You'll hear my dad built this place as a monument to the family and so I could have my own private golf course. Maybe I do spend too much time trying to lower my handicap but don't be misled if people refer to me as a golf-playing fool. Believe me, I've still got a firm hand on the throttle."

Thanking him again I quietly made my way out of the administration building. As reassured as I had been by the conversation, I was still left with nagging thoughts that wouldn't go away. Why had Mr. Jones been so interested in me? Why had I been hired? What did Mr. Jones really think of me? Why was he so insistent on hiring someone armed and with police powers?

And what were the "undercurrents" of which he spoke?

CHAPTER 5—SPINNING MY WHEELS

The time given us to get settled was more than adequate. We moved in the following day after a trip to the mainland to create a new life for ourselves from everyday items found on the shelves of any Wal-Mart. The first night in our new home, Mel dropped right off, but accustomed to the dark, comfortable atmosphere of the brownstone in which we had lived for so many years, for me sleep was slow in coming. Finally, I turned off the air conditioning and opened the sliding glass door to the deck. With the late summer breeze gently ruffling the curtains I then drifted off into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The weekend passed by uneventfully as we worked hard to organize things in the condo, and Monday morning decked out in the two-tone brown uniform with the silver Chief of Security badge

that had appeared the previous day on our doorstep I decided eight-thirty was a reasonable time to put in an appearance at the office.

Turning into the causeway I followed a line of cars making their way through the barrier gate that was unmanned and left in the open position. So much for security and traffic control. Arriving at the gatehouse I pulled into an empty space beside a Crown Victoria cruiser complete with siren, light bar, and keys that I removed from the ignition. White with colorful accent stripes, the door decals depicted a fierce American eagle, feathers brushed back, menacing beak, ready to strike. Underneath in large black letters, were the reassuring words “To protect and to serve.” I hoped the LAPD would never find out as their black and white color scheme seemed strangely out of place in the otherwise color-coordinated community.

Entering the office from the sliding doors overlooking the entry road, I was greeted by an electric coffeepot gurgling away under a “Think Safety-Work Safely” poster.

A noisy window air conditioner failed to completely dispel the lingering odor of cigarette smoke, while one of the overhead fluorescent lights hummed loudly, another flickering annoyingly. A gray metal desk near the sliding glass doors had a commanding view down the causeway which I assumed helped in traffic control. Another desk against the rear wall guarded the entrance to an inner office, from which a previous occupant’s nameplate on the door had clearly been removed. I assumed it was mine. Above the computer was a photo of a young mousy, dishwater blonde with Little Orphan Annie hair and weak features, wearing an academic gown, not exactly a fun person. Next to it was a framed community college diploma proclaiming Mona Alexandra Wisdom had received an Associate degree in Justice Studies and from which dangled a black and silver tassel.

My own domain turned out to be a cheerless room with white wood paneling that had never seen a tree, threadbare carpet clinging to the floor for dear life. Dominating the room was an ancient wooden

desk, it's tattered blotter not up to the task of covering up the cigarette burns. After going through the jumbled contents of its drawers the most interesting thing I found was in a folder marked Evidence—a half-pint bottle of Jim Beam. Hearing the sliding door open I got rid of the libation and the woman in the photo knocked timidly. She was heavier than pictured and taller than I would have guessed, about five foot eight. Her hair was now cut short, and she had been to LensCrafters. This contributed further to her no-nonsense, businesslike demeanor, consistent with her firm, forceful but not unpleasant voice when she introduced herself, saying that the Coastal guy must have left early even though he was supposed to wait until she came back from her

coffee break.

I responded by asking her to tell me something about herself. She said she was born and raised in Perdido and had graduated from high school there. Originally she had aspired to be a physical therapist, but running low on money she finally enrolled in the local community college's program in criminal justice. Her degree read "Justice Studies" by the time she graduated, which I guess means criminals aren't the real problem anymore. She had applied for a job with the state police but she was not selected, and getting a position with the local police department required political pull she didn't have. The sheriff's department wasn't hiring, so six years ago she reluctantly accepted a secretarial position with Paradise Development, assigned to work with Coastal in the security office. She had been hired personally by Mr. Jones and she was better paid than most of the other women in similar positions. Her pay differential, she explained, was because her job involved more than being a secretary. Mr. Jones made it very clear that working in a confidential capacity she was to be his eyes and ears monitoring the security operation, an unusually responsible position for a young adult just out of college. Over the years she had uncovered a number of problems, duly reported to Mr. Jones and which had resulted in both terminations and changes in operating procedures. Amazingly, no one ever suspected the role

she played, her cover was still intact. Rewarded in salary for her efforts, this further distanced her from her co-workers, to the point that it was widely rumored that she was being compensated by Mr. Jones for services rendered outside of office hours and definitely of a salacious nature. She told me this is something I would pick up on the grapevine. She swore that her relationship with Mr. Jones involved nothing of a personal nature, in fact, she had very little contact with him. Nevertheless, she was effectively shunned in the island community, her only real friend being Cecelia Wentworth, the Horizon Grill manager, who she wanted me to meet.

At this point she paused in her narrative, shifting around in the uncomfortable visitor's chair. To help put her at ease I gave her the truncated version of my life's story and asked her what she expected of me as her boss.

She replied forthrightly. "I'm twenty-seven right now, and the only real thing I have going for me is my college degree. I still want more than anything else to be a law enforcement professional. I was thinking of quitting, and then when Mr. Jones told me about you I decided to wait and see what you were like. I would like to learn from you, but this will take time, so don't worry that I'm going to pick your brains and then leave you high and dry. I'm just not that type of person."

Not sure how to respond, I sensed that she had something more to say.

"This is hard for me, but I promise you that my duties as a paid snitch will never apply to you. I'm going to make it very plain to Mr. Jones that from now on any information he gets about security has to come from you, not me. Now, what do you want done?"

I suggested she could get me a desk with locking drawers, an ergonomic office chair, a desk organizer with a calendar in which to keep appointments, and a user-friendly state-of-the-art computer. I also told her I was considering a major upgrade of the office furniture, and I asked her to come up with a list of things needed

and figure out how to pay for them. She said that would be no problem. Ready to get to work, I asked why the gate wasn't manned. Mona explained this was to accommodate the arrival of the more than one hundred funeral directors attending the three-day seminar: "Death and Taxes." Because of the approaching unstable weather system their golf tournament had been rescheduled from the last day, much to the displeasure of the women's association that normally occupied the course.

I had anticipated a quiet day as my boss was in Miami, although the previous night's activity report suggested undertakers at play were totally capable of discarding the somber mien adopted by their profession. The report was logged in at 9:09 a.m., when Mona ignored the intercom to shout excitedly, "Chief Adams! Emergency! Go to the golf course at once! It's Dave on the phone who says something terrible has happened! First tee. You go. I'll call 911 and the sheriff. People have been injured, and…." I was out the door while she was still talking.

Settling down in my shiny new cruiser I decided to use the siren to help establish my image as a take-charge type of guy in the face of a genuine disaster. After pressing several buttons and unable to turn it on, wheels spinning in the loose sand I figured that would have to do instead.

CHAPTER 6—THE DAY BEFORE TOMORROW

Bypassing the clubhouse parking lot I eased the cruiser down the walkway and inched my way through the gathering crowd in front of the building. As I leaped out I saw a fellow in a blood-spattered white golfing outfit comforting a gray-haired man slumped forward on the players' bench, crimson-stained fingers covering his face. Pushing my way farther into the crowd I saw the reason for the ashen faces and averted eyes—a cruelly distorted figure, blackened and torn clothing, his downward-tilting head covered with a bloodstained white golf towel. His body was resting at a crazy angle with his right arm disappearing into the brilliant reds, yellows and blues of the hothouse flowers bordering the elevated tee box, his shiny golf spikes pointed skyward. From my cop days I was no stranger to violent death but when it came to gruesome—this one was right up there. Familiar as the conventioneers were with the varied faces of death, I could see many shared my sentiments.

Seeing there was nothing I could do for the poor guy I moved the crowd back to the sidewalk in front of the pro shop, away from the tragedy's grisly aftermath: tattered shreds of clothing, blackened strands of human hair, and a sports watch with a single strap, the seconds still flying by. Desperately in need of help, I called Mona on my cell phone and asked her to have Coastal round up an

additional officer. Next I checked on the man on the bench, who seemed to be reviving. The guy attending him, fortunately EMT-trained, assured me he was in no real danger.

Surveying the scene I tried to determine what had happened. The corpse's wounds were not of the gunshot variety, my best guess was an explosion of some sort. This was confirmed by a short, rotund slightly dazed elderly man I spied on the edge of the crowd, with visible but not serious cuts and scratches. He was wearing a well-worn, slightly charred Caribbean-motif golf shirt. "I still can't believe it," he said hoarsely. "Art set up to tee off, wound up with his driver and…." Words momentarily failing him I could see he was close to going into shock.

"Just a minute. What's your name, Sir?" I asked in an attempt to settle him down. His color didn't look bad but I was still worried he might be suffering from a concussion.

"Vern Tanner," he replied. "Boulder, Colorado. We were playing today… worried about the weather…" he continued disjointedly. "Never seen the guy before… maybe in the bar last night...airlines lost his clubs so he had to rent some from the pro shop." Eyes narrowing he paused, taking a deep breath, trying to cope with the horror he had witnessed. "His loaner clubs included one of those expensive oversize drivers. He wound up…hit the ball…and that was it…exploded!"

"What exploded?" I asked expectantly.

The little man paused for a long moment, finally continuing in a steadier voice, "That's it. I don't know...Maybe the ball. Maybe the club. Maybe someone threw something. It all happened so fast I couldn't tell. I was standing beside the tee box, otherwise I would have got it like the guy sitting on the bench...How's he, anyway?"

"He's going to be okay," I answered confidently. The man's shocked expression was returning and sensing I would get little

more from him I took his name, room number and home address, and said I might want to talk to him later.

Someone waiting patiently to see me identified himself as the remaining golfer in the foursome. He was of little help. A funeral director from San Diego, he didn't know the victim until they met on the first tee. Along with a lot of other people he had heard the explosion, but because he had gone back to the clubhouse to purchase tees he had not seen what had happened.

Remembering the crime scene tape in the trunk of the cruiser, in a calculated show of authority I secured the area. Just as I finished, siren blaring, the Island EMT's arrived. I cleared the way for them to treat the less-injured man's cuts and bruises while they placed the guy who was really hurting on a wheeled stretcher, hooking him up to an electronic monitor. Siren again screeching, they took off for the county hospital leaving the victim for the coroner's attention.

Shortly thereafter I identified what was unmistakably an unmarked police vehicle approaching. Meeting it at the edge of the crowd the window rolled down to reveal the wide eyes and pleasantly proportioned features of the small-boned woman driving, uniform shirt open at the neck, sergeant's stripes on her sleeve.

Speaking clearly and precisely and with a firm edge to her voice, she announced, "I'm Billie Greene, and I'm looking for Chief Adams. I understand there's been an accident of some sort." I took in her short light brown hair, feathery bangs, lack of makeup, and the lustrous, hazel eyes that unflinchingly met mine. "You're talking to him. Am I glad to see you. Look around. I really need some help on this one," I added gratefully.

"That's interesting. I'm surprised because I assumed being from New York you'd run into almost everything," she replied directly, coolly self-contained. Not quite sure how to take her remark, but still stung by the comment, I thought, here was another person I'd

never met who seemed to know a whole lot about me, and maybe didn’t like what they saw to boot.

As she got out of the car I noticed the custom fit of her blue shirt and forest green slacks, her trim waist, flat stomach and compact, athletic body suggesting someone who kept in shape. I revised my estimate of her age, upward, mid-thirties, and added a couple of inches to her height, maybe five foot eight. Approaching the crime scene, she had me clear curious onlookers from in front of the pro shop while she flipped open a pocket notebook to make a small, neat diagram of the area. This completed, she motioned me to follow her under the yellow tape, warning me not to disturb anything on the elevated tee box. Even though parts of the area had been trampled down by the crowd, Sgt. Greene pointed out barely discernible, scattered, crystalline flakes and metal fragments probably from the golf club destroyed by the blast. At that point, green jumpsuited crime scene technicians arrived on the scene and quickly unloaded the tools of their trade: clipboards and notebooks, several cameras, a professional looking camcorder with a wheeled tripod, evidence bags, and a miscellaneous collection of cases, mostly black, old and battered, one with shiny silver metal sides and a combination lock. Altima County CSU was stenciled across the back of their coveralls, and they were clearly crime scene unit veterans as evidenced by their macabre humor and insensitivity to the presence of violent death. I was impressed by the methodical way they conducted the investigation. Measuring, photographing, sketching and searching, they used magnifying glasses to look for evidence from the crime scene that they then picked up with tweezers and sealed in small brown paper bags on which they made Magic Marker notations.

With no role in the investigation I was heading for the parking lot when I ran into Sgt. Greene accompanied by a tall, suntanned and well-conditioned man wearing a smartly tailored green Ike jacket with pressed blue jeans with razor creases bloused in shiny boots. Heading for the accident scene he broke stride momentarily to give me a fleeting, but firm handshake. The two stars on his shoulder

told me I had just met Sheriff Perkins, with whom I had yet to meet regarding certification as a deputy.

Arriving at the office, Mona and “Buzz” Akins, an off-duty deputy, were busy answering the phone, now ringing virtually nonstop. On my desk I quickly scanned the calls they had thought worthy of my attention, deciding my boss was first. I was encouraged by his response to the news, saying that he trusted me to handle matters. This consisted mainly of traffic control, trying to give preference to official vehicles. Mona and I kept busy answering the phone, until late afternoon when I told her to go home. With the night man having arrived, eager to see what was happening at the accident scene I was about to leave when Sgt. Greene pulled up at the gate. I invited her in, offering her a soft drink from the mini-refrigerator as an alternative to what remained of Ms. Wisdom’s questionable coffee. She eagerly accepted and popping the tab on the can she gingerly lowered herself onto the adjacent visitor’s chair, squirming around and trying to get comfortable, considerably more at ease than when we had first met. Taking out her notebook, she consulted it briefly before she spoke.

“Even though you haven’t come on board with us yet, you’re the head guy here and I’m sure you want to know what we have learned,” she started. “In a word: not much. The guy died from the direct effects of a powerful, controlled explosion activated by the club striking the ball. Whether the explosive agent was in the club, ball, or both is something we don’t yet know. We didn’t get much in the way of concrete evidence, mainly because of all the people tramping around the scene, hey, not your fault, the damage was done before you got there. We found trace elements we are sending to the crime lab at the community college. Hopefully, they should be able to identify the explosive. We found some fragments from the ball and the head of the club, and we’ve got the grip and upper part of the club shaft, pretty much intact. Let me do this—I’ll call you as soon as I get the interim report,” she concluded, looking at me expectantly. Slumped in the uncomfortable chair, she looked

tired, and her manner softened even more as she exclaimed, “I’m beat!”

“Me, too,” I replied. “It’s been a long day. But, is there anything you’d like me to do? With my experience I could be of some help. And, besides, doing nothing drives me nuts,” I added truthfully.

“I’m not sure,” she started, a faraway look in her eyes as she collected her thoughts. “We’ll talk to the guy at the hospital when he comes around, but maybe some of the happy ghouls at the meeting can give us a lead. I still think this could be some sort of practical joke gone wrong, you know the crazy things that happen at conventions. I don’t play golf, thank God, but aren’t exploding golf balls high on the list of things you guys consider cool? Like drinking beer for breakfast and rolling around on the ground…”

“Billie,” I countered quickly. “Maybe at conventions and fraternity outings, but strictly frowned on by the U.S. Golf Association. But, it’s a thought since I’ve really run into a dead end in this investigation,” I added flippantly. Her expression told me she picked up on the metaphor, another good sign.

“You know, Charley, you’re not at all what I expected. I know you’re frustrated and I’ll try to help. Tomorrow we’ll do a number on Mr. Arthur Ulrich of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Did he have any dough? Who profits from his passing? Did he have any enemies? Did he have any friends or relatives in the area? I’ll be in touch.” Pleased by the sincerity of her offer I told her she’d made my day. Purposefully she unwound herself from her chair, on the way to the door crushing her soda can and making two points with a bank shot into a nearby wastebasket.

Following her out of the office I happened to catch the date on the television as it scrolled by on the bottom of the screen: Monday, September 10, 2001.

CHAPTER 7—SEPTEMBER MORNING

The following morning, arriving early and with the weather deteriorating, I headed for the clubhouse only to discover the morning staff meeting was canceled. Touring by the crime scene it was still roped off, guarded by a deputy who clearly did not consider rentacops to be members of the law enforcement community. Before I could decide what to do next, my cell phone rang. It was Mona, highly excited, her voice resonating the receiver.

“Chief Adams! Come quick…you won’t believe it! I’m watching on TV right now. Oh! Oh! Those poor people in New York...a plane crashed right into the building and there’s smoke and everything…It’s terrible!...terrible!...please come….”

On the short ride back to the office I turned on the cruiser’s radio, the somber, measured tones of a veteran newscaster filling in the details “…again. At eight forty-five this morning New York City residents were greeted by the frightening crash of a commercial airliner into the north tower of the World Trade Center, tearing a gaping hole in the building and setting it on fire. I am here at the scene to report on the response of firefighters and emergency personnel to this horrific disaster. You can hear the sirens in the background. Everyone is urged to remain calm and to keep away from the immediate area in the face of what appears to be a tragic accident accompanied by loss of life both on the airliner and in the building. We hope to be receiving an official statement from the office of the mayor that we will share with you when—” With a deep sense of foreboding and dread I turned off the radio and proceeded into the office.

I was proud of Mona. Visibly shaken, she was nevertheless composed and on the phone assuring a caller there had been no

more explosions on the island and that they would be safe staying inside. The office phones were now ringing nonstop. At first it was anxious residents asking when the course would reopen, now they were concerned about their own safety because of what was happening nationally. I told Mona to continue to say we had no reason to believe the island was under attack, and that they should keep tuned to their radio or television to keep abreast of the national situation.

With the news on in the office I sat through that dreadful few minutes while the tower smoked like a live volcano and I finally connected with what was happening in New York City—my home! Mel's home! Going into my office to make the call I got a busy signal, my wife obviously in touch with some of her friends back home. I was about to dial Mr. Jones when Mona called excitedly "Boss! You've got to see this! Another plane just crashed into the other building…they're both on fire…and the people...the people… I can't watch…. " I was in front of the office TV set before she could finish her sentence and in a spontaneous gesture I held her close while she sobbed into my uniform shirt. The deputy gave us a sideways look as she slowly regained her composure. The three of us drew up chairs in front of the set and with the sound turned down continued to answer the phones, our eyes glued to the screen. Slowly the enormity of the disaster sunk in, but what I remember most is that awful half hour when first one, then the other tower, collapsed in a cloud of rubble. Then, and only then, did it all come together. In my mind's eye I vividly recalled the scene from my rear view mirror as the twin towers faded into the distance, the image so overpowering I got up to get a soda so nobody would see how upset I was.

Dialing home again I finally connected with Mel. She picked up after the first ring, calmer than I had expected, concerned for the uniforms in the New York area including those from our precinct who would be involved and at risk. I assured her as best I could

that the whole thing was in the hands of firefighters, well trained and working with specialized equipment., and that uniforms from the precincts were most likely engaged in crowd and traffic control. I'm not sure she believed me. I'm not sure I believed me either. I also told her I was needed to answer the phones, but I would call again to see how she was doing. This seemed to satisfy her and I went back to the phone messages that most merited my personal attention.

As the day's tragic events unfolded, despite my assurances to Mel my concerns increasingly turned to those I had left behind in the precinct. I shuddered to think if any of them had been in either tower when they collapsed but it was a distinct possibility. It's part of the job, cops live with death every day they report for duty. But it is usually conceptualized in personal terms, not tons of fiery debris crushing out one's life on a beautiful September morning.

Thoughts of my own disaster returned when my boss called asking if there had been any progress in the golf course investigation, the recent focus of my thoughts, now completely forgotten. I told him I was following up with the sheriff's department and that I was awaiting a report. I assumed he was aware of what was happening in New York but he hung up before I could ask him.

The day dragged on as vivid images of the disaster and its aftermath were played accompanied by endless speculation about method and motive. As a native New Yorker I think Mayor Giuliani said it best when asked about the number of people who lost their lives: "I don't think we want to speculate about that—more than any of us can bear." The Coastal guy, Buzz, remained to pull the second shift. With his wife expecting he was happy for the overtime. Mona stayed late, not wanting to be alone.

After she left, while dining on some cold pizza my thoughts turned to my administrative assistant. Even though we had but limited contact so far, it had been under extremely trying conditions

capable of revealing a person's true character. I gave her high marks for the way she had conducted herself when under fire, and for the

comfortable familiarity that was quickly developing between us. Looking ahead I promised myself that I would help her all I could to advance as a law enforcement professional, even though it might mean she would eventually move on to bigger and better things. Any further thoughts along this line disappeared when the deputy buzzed to tell me it was Sgt. Greene on the line.

"What a day! It's a madhouse here, but I didn't forget about you. I was able to make a phone call before all hell broke loose. Luckily, the victim didn't live in Pittsburgh but in a small town in the suburbs. Seems he and the police chief were buddies from way back. Turns out the guy was seventy-two years old and he had already turned over his funeral business to his son. But he still liked to go to professional meetings and visit with his old buddies. Never was anyone less likely to be a murder victim. His life was an open book—everyone loved the guy—as much as you can love an undertaker. And, the Chief said he would have known if the guy drank, gambled, played around with women or had any hidden vices. Nothing! Zero! Nada! Zilch!"

The pause that followed gave me time to interject, "In other words, not a hint of the usual motives. About par for the course for a retired undertaker in his seventies," I observed in a bad golf metaphor.

"Right on. For all practical purposes he'd transferred his assets to his three kids. His wife died five years ago and he still lived in the old family home near his kids. He didn't feud with his neighbors and for the past few years he hadn't been active in the business so no one had a score to settle on that account. Plus, he had no friends or relatives south of the Mason Dixon line. They're pretty much your stay-at-home family, close-knit and doing things together, whatever they do for fun up there. But, we did learn he was thinking about possibly retiring to Florida. In fact, he told the chief

he was taken on a tour of the island last year about this time by one of the salespersons who talked a blue streak. Any idea who that might be?"

"Sounds like Mrs. Baines. She has an advanced degree in mindless chatter. She sells real estate although she doubles as some sort of bird dog for Jones the Second."

"Funny you should mention that because maybe it was she who took the late Mr. Ulrich in for a personal meeting with the head guy. Is that SOP out there on the island?"

"Don't really know. An appointment was arranged for me, not because I was a hot sales prospect but because they were looking for a rentacop. But, I'm sure that's not news to you, I'm beginning to think my biography must have appeared in the local newspaper. Did you follow up with Mr. Jones and see what the meeting was all about?"

"Are you kidding! That's your call. In fact for the time being consider the whole sorry mess dumped in your lap. It's no secret a lot of what happened in New York started on the Florida coast and we are now doing grunt work for some of the big boys running around in circles. I'm already late for a meeting so…." Sensing I was being sent up the proverbial creek without the requisite paddle, I interrupted in a desperate attempt to keep my only contact with real law enforcement alive. "Please, before you go," I pleaded, "what did you get from the lab?"

"Sorry. I forgot. Their preliminary report says the golf club, not the ball, triggered the explosion. It's pretty technical, but it seems the force of the explosion impacted the inner surface of the club, and produced fragments from the outer surface of what little they found of the ball. The explosion, in itself, was not necessarily lethal. The victim's small stature, age and physical condition were all contributing factors. They were also able to identify the golf club by make and model and they talked to your golf guy and it's identical to ones he sells in the pro shop. The explosion destroyed

much of the evidence limiting what forensics can tell us, but they said they'd keep working on it which means it's in the dead file. Since the whole thing happened on your turf why don't you try to discover exactly how the late Mr. Ulrich hooked up with the apparent murder weapon."

"Will do," I replied, happy to be officially acknowledged as part of the investigative team. "One final thing, what did they have to say about the explosive?"

A long pause followed my question. "Well, it's kinda funny," she replied cautiously. "The folks at the college said it was a discontinued military explosive. When I asked them to be more specific they said they would first have to consult another law enforcement jurisdiction, that's how they put it. I know what you're thinking: was your little bang part of the bigger bangs that took place up North? It would be a stretch, a long one, but if you're in the picture someone will let you know pretty quick, probably telling you to back off under threat of death or worse. So, follow up with the golf pro and find out how the dead guy ended up with the lethal golf club. Gotta go now…."

On that cheery note the line went dead.

CHAPTER 8—IN MY OWN BACKYARD

Right after a crime cops are the busiest, knowing chances of solving it are best when the trail is still warm. Conventional cop wisdom says the first twenty four hours are critical, although there's no magic number when the investigation starts to become less and less productive. The long arm of international terrorism had effectively cost us a day, and that plus the weather had disrupted the convention, clogging the causeway the following morning with a stream of homeward bound cars and leaving many of those traveling by air in the lurch. This made it difficult for me to search for further witnesses, and with the seriously hurt guy in the hospital being off limits the investigation as far as I was concerned was now virtually at a standstill.

Following up on Billie's advice I arrived at the golf shop shortly after it opened, with its neatly spaced racks of colorful and stylish golf clothing emblazoned with recognizable logos, plus eye-catching clusters of shiny woods and irons fanned out invitingly in colorful displays, no prices visible. I guess if you had to ask, you couldn't afford them. Dave Williams, the resident golf pro, was manning the front desk, a fortyish, handsome, heavily-suntanned athletic figure with thinning unnaturally blond blow-dried hair, light amber eyes accented by squint lines, wearing teal slacks and a pink Polo shirt with the corporate logo.

He didn't seem happy to see me but he didn't seem unhappy either, just worried.

"Chief Adams. I thought you'd be around. Let's go back to my office where we can talk." Beckoning to the trim young woman trying to restore some semblance of order to the clothing displays he asked her to relieve him on the front desk, and I followed him into his cramped, windowless office. After he cleared the visitor's chair of its piled-high collection of everything from head covers to golf shirts, he started forthrightly, "I guess you know about my call from the cops?" A little miffed the sheriff's investigators had beaten me to the punch, I waited for him to continue. "They told me the explosive was in the club, not the ball. And from the bits

and pieces they figured out it was one of those oversize titanium drivers I stock in the pro shop…"

"But," I interrupted, "wasn't he playing with a loaner set of clubs because the airlines lost his?"

"Yes, he was. The drivers in the bags we lend out are identical to the ones we sell. It's part of the deal we have with the manufacturer's representative. He thinks it helps sell clubs if people have a chance to try them out and when new models come out he takes back the old ones that are then sold as demos. The current driver was a new model that came out some three weeks ago, so it hadn't been in the bag very long."

Briefly I pondered the significance of his remarks before asking, "So, tell me all about these loaner clubs. How many do you have? Where are they kept? Do you have a record of who gets them?

"Come this way," he said, rising from his seat. Extricating myself from the visitor's chair wedged between the door and an ancient wooden filing cabinet,

I followed him into the adjacent storeroom. Heaped in the far corner were nine identical pro tour-type bags, their logos leaping out from across the crowded room, each identically stocked with a full set of manufacturer's clubs way beyond the reach of a former public course golf rat like me. The pro smiled knowledgeably. "Yeah. It's a far cry from the rental clubs at many courses: mismatched woods and irons left out in the rain. But when you're getting a hundred-plus bucks a round you can't treat people like they just showed up at the muni. Besides, with the distributor footing the bill it doesn't cost me a thing," he confessed.

"I'm with you so far," I interjected, taking a shiny oversized driver from one of the bags and swinging it gently, reveling in the feel and balance. "How do you decide who's eligible to check out clubs, and how does a golfer end up with a given set of clubs? If you get my meaning…." My voice trailed off uncertainly.

“Yeah. Unlike most things around here, it’s totally random. Not that we give out clubs to anyone off the street. We just don’t schedule them the night before like the golf carts. But, when it’s a guest of a member, or someone registered at the conference center who doesn’t have clubs, we come back here and grab a bag, any bag, except it’s more likely to be one near the front. That’s all there is to it, nothing very complicated.” Visibly pleased with his knowledgeable answer, the pro settled back on his heels, waiting for me to speak.

“Okay. Fine. Now, tell me, who has access to the storeroom?” I asked, returning the club to its bag and going over to examine the dead-bolt lock on the door.

“That’s a good question because in fact it’s open all day long,” he replied quickly. “The locks to the front door and the storeroom were changed about a year ago, and Melody and I and the cart guy have keys. There are other keys, too, like an extra one in my desk drawer which is locked at night, your office, and the fire station. Plus, anyone with a master key could get in, although that’s limited to people such as you and your boss. When we’re open the storeroom is unlocked but visible to whoever’s at the front desk. Most everyone respects the ‘Employees Only’ sign except for a couple of old geezers who think rules don’t apply to them. I know where you’re coming from. I haven’t the faintest idea when someone last played with those clubs. And, it’s relatively easy for anyone, I mean *anyone*, to have come in here and replaced the driver in one of the bags. I guess you really wouldn’t have to be a rocket scientist to set up a club to explode on impact. That’s been bugging me. The guy must have had access to the storeroom before the murder to rig up the explosive. This means he either loaded up one from the pro shop, or substituted one he bought elsewhere.”

“Okay. One last question. Does the pro shop key also let one into the shed where the golf carts are stored?”

“No it doesn’t, because there’s a padlock on the cart shed door. I bought a new one about a year ago and also made it a lot harder to

break in. I have a key, along with the kid who washes the carts and the retired military guy who's the starter. That's all. I'm really into limiting access to the cart shed because last year some kids broke in and went joyriding to the tune of several thousand in damage to fairways and greens."

Impressed with his reasoning, I asked him if he had any more ideas. He had none. I thanked him sincerely and made my departure. Climbing the nearby stairs to the Horizon Grill it seemed clear that Dave Williams was definitely smarter than he looked.

It was only after I was on my way out with a to-go cup of coffee that I came to fully appreciate the significance of what the pro had told me. It was chance, and chance

alone that determined who lived and who died, like playing Russian roulette with one of those revolvers that chambered nine rounds. Unless I was very much mistaken that was clearly the act of terrorist.

CHAPTER 9—NIGHT WALK

Navigating the rain-slick steps of the administration building I pondered how to get my boss's secretary to check on the late Mr. Ulrich's meeting with Mr. Jones. Maximizing eye contact and minimizing the number of multi-syllabic words, I took my best shot. "I need to see Mr. Jones's appointment book for September last year."

Wordlessly she left the office, returning shortly with an oversized engagement calendar bound in green leather. It didn't take me long. Turning to the week of September ninth I found the late Mr. Ulrich scheduled for a 10:30 am Wednesday appointment. When I was considering my next move, Ms. Watson activated the intercom for what was an unexpected, terse utterance. "Chief Adams is here," she intoned flatly, the inner office door swinging open. Mr. Jones gestured me over to the leather couch, asking me how the investigation was progressing.

Worried how he might react, I decided to deal directly with the personal issue. "I'm helping the authorities follow up on the victim, Arthur Ulrich, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Last year in September it appears he had an appointment with you, probably to discuss property. I know you meet a lot of people but perhaps you might remember something that could be helpful," I said in my best disarmingly casual manner.

"I meet so many people it's hard to keep track and Mrs. Baines doesn't always use good judgment. Sorry, I can't help you." Having run out of steam I was happy to have my boss continue. "Glad you're here because I was going to call you. When people at Paradise Cay get worked up they collect the signatures to call for a meeting of the residents association. These meetings are management's worst nightmare since they often go on far into the night and end up costing me money. I have to chair the meetings, which quickly get out of control, but with security the issue I'll turn things over to you because this is your area. Dwell heavily on your experience as a NYPD cop because of all the good press you and your buddies are getting right now. I've scheduled the meeting for tomorrow night in the hope this will keep down attendance, although interest in Monday's disaster guarantees a good turnout."

Rising quickly he extended his hand, signaling an end to our meeting. On the way back to the office it occurred to me that Mr. Jones seemed somewhat uncomfortable with my question about the victim's visit. And, it was interesting how quick he was to assume

that it was Ms. Baines who had arranged the appointment. Gesturing Mona to follow me, I closed the door and updated her on the residents meeting.

Mr. Jones, she explained, hated the meetings with a passion. Anything and everything was open for discussion, and any attempt to stick to the published agenda usually failed. The problem was he kept passing the ball to the rest of his team, but when it came to the post-game wrap up he reminded everyone that management ultimately made the decisions and any comments by the staff were strictly advisory. Fortunately, concerns over security had always been minor, usually limited to specific complaints, such as, “When they rescued Sapphire from the tree they tore up the flowers.”

Realizing I would be on the proverbial hot seat I sought Mona’s advice on how to prepare for the occasion. “There’s no way,” she stated enigmatically. “The meetings just happen…someone gets up and asks a question…someone else interrupts … someone gets hostile and ‘demands’ an explanation….” Her voice trailed off, not a good sign. Here I was, soon to be faced with my greatest challenge yet as Chief and my knowledgeable colleague had run out of ideas.

Anxious to accomplish something, I spent the rest of the morning collecting statements from the remaining conventioneers before they departed back to wherever they served the needs of the bereaved. Turning up nothing of interest I headed to the Horizon Grill for lunch, where the golf crowd was out in force, with pars and birdies taking a back seat to the national crisis, with no small amount of table talk focused on when the stock market was likely to reopen and the probable effect of the attacks on personal portfolios.

Less than pleased by the stalled investigation, I hung out by the office TV until late afternoon when Mona picked up with a call for me from the sheriff’s office. I pointed to the clock showing it was near her quitting time and went back into my office, turning on the speaker phone to hear Billie’s voice, slightly tinny, but coming

through loud and clear, “Charley, I know you’re busy so I’ll be brief. First, the guy in the hospital is doing okay, but at the time of the explosion he was hunting a ball in his golf bag and he doesn’t remember a thing after that. So, how’d your day go?”

“Not good,” I came back quickly. “Other than the fact that the late Mr. Ulrich

looked on professional meetings as a welcome alternative to the dead people he used to hang out with, I learned very little. The borrowed clubs were grabbed randomly from a storeroom that’s unlocked all day and for which many people seem to have keys. Whoever juiced up that driver just sat back and then waited for some unlucky dude to get the bag. To me that sounds suspiciously like a terrorist. How about it—don’t you agree?”

“I guess so. But what’s the point? Maybe some hard-core crazies in the Middle East have it in for us, but I can’t believe that anyone could be that exercised about a retired undertaker or a stupid game. It’s been a long day and I got just three hours sleep last night. So, keep your eyes open and when things settle down I’ll get back to you. Go home, enjoy your dinner, get a good night’s sleep and be thankful you’re in paradise while us working stiffs burn the midnight oil. Okay?”

I took her advice. As I turned into the driveway I realized I was long overdue in spending time at home and bringing Mel into the picture. Originally she had been preoccupied with setting up our new home. What worried me was whether all this was in fact a substitute for time spent on the job and with her past friends. And, the present tragedy had made things even worse. Despite Mel’s big city friends telling her how lucky she was to have “escaped,” the hours she spent on the phone told me she would have far preferred to be back on the firing line when it came to sharing one’s innermost thoughts in a time of crisis.

When I got home, resurrecting the tacos she had on hold Mel was stony-faced and silent throughout the meal, then settling down in

front of the television. The breaking news helped me realize how far out of the loop I was in the law enforcement pecking order, reporting that Federal agents were serving search warrants in South Florida and it was suspected some of the terrorists may have trained near Vero Beach. Assailed by scenes from New York, Mel switched to the weather channel, finally reaching for the remote to kill an overly loud commercial, effectively restoring the lost art—conversation.

“Charley. You arrived home over an hour late and not a word from you as to where you’ve been. I’ve just about had it with this job of yours. Originally, it seemed like a perfect fit, almost like a part-time job, not a whole new career. I’m still getting used to us not spending our days together, when I knew what was going on. I’m beginning to wonder if I was cut out to be a housewife. You’ve been going nonstop since that guy blew himself up on the golf course. And, with the dreadful news from New York, do you have any idea what it’s been like for me?” she asked, tears welling up in her eyes.

“I certainly do,” I answered in my most reassuring tone of voice, trying to decide whether to proceed on a gut level, fraught with danger, or take the placation route, generally a safe alternative. “But you’ve got to remember it hasn’t been easy for me either. I was just a paper-pushing cop, not a detective, something like this is way over my head. When it comes to what’s happening up North I understand why I’ve been hung out to dry and people don’t take me into their confidence. And, what little I know I’ve been told not to share with anyone, at least not for the time being.” Seeing her expression soften I decided things were moving in the right direction, and that I should continue to focus attention away from insensitivity on my part as a possible root cause of her stated concerns. Her response told me I was succeeding.

“Okay. So I’m out of line. Maybe things aren’t as bad as I made them out. Guess I just wanted to pull your chain a little. What’s going on in New York has really got to me because the stuff with

the police and fire fighters strikes too close to home. When we left the City I told you I wouldn't look back and I'm not going to start now. And, the weather hasn't helped any," she concluded sympathetically, her attention directed toward the soundless local weather person projected against an ominous, swirling approaching display of reds, greens and yellows. Reaching for the remote she killed the picture observing, "I'm tired of the weather people and their gloom and doom. It's not raining right now and you know what would do us both good—a walk on the beach?"

Grabbing windbreakers and a flashlight we headed for Rosewood Point, a small beach we had yet to explore. There braving the strengthening winds we walked hand in hand, buffeted by occasional gusts which pushed us off course, the flashlight's probing beam catching fleeting glimpses of ghost crabs retreating to their subterranean world. With conversation made difficult by the whistling wind and the crashing surf, we watched the faraway lights of a freighter slowly working its way down the coast, the only activity we saw in the stormy sea. Finally, with our mental batteries recharged and our differences forgotten, we headed home to face the challenges of the future.

With the raging wind rattling the glass doors leading to the deck, Mel, dropped right off to sleep, as usual, while I tossed and turned the night away. Finally I crept back downstairs to the ultimate soporific—the tube!

I was greeted with the distinctly unwelcome news that a hurricane watch was in effect from Chokoloskee north to Tarpon Springs, but that's all I remember.

CHAPTER 10—COMPUTER GURUS

Thursday morning I slept in, to be awakened shortly by gusting winds hurling sheets of water against the glass doors of the deck in a violent weather event that lasted but a few minutes. Turning on the television a tired looking weatherman said that tomorrow developing hurricane Gabrielle was expected to make land on the west coast of Florida, somewhere near Venice, an unpredictable storm track too close for comfort. Boaters were being warned to take precautions against flooding at high tides, to watch for gale

force winds or higher, and to put out more lines, extra anchors and batten things down. Perhaps this wasn't news to the locals, but for us transplanted New Yorkers this was clearly a natural phenomenon of epic proportions. My general uneasiness elevated yet another notch when after donning my slicker I watched the garage door struggle up as it rippled in the swirling winds.

Arriving at the office, after sifting through a sheaf of messages inquiring about an early morning power outage, now remedied, I took the cruiser to check up on what damage the island might have suffered. With the sky clearing somewhat, residents had once again taken to the streets, creating heavy traffic on the Loop road. Motorists even stopped at the crosswalks, watching pedestrians battle the wind on chicken legs, resolute in their determination to stock up on staples such as flashlight batteries and beer in anticipation of further bad weather to come.

With the wind picking up in force, I headed back to the office. It was a good thing I did because patiently waiting was a bespectacled little man slouched in one of the uncomfortable visitors' chairs, umbrella hanging from the arm, his nose buried in a scholarly-looking journal. His rumpled khaki trousers competed for attention with the pastel blue open-collared shirt and penny loafers with mismatched socks. He reminded me of any number of my CCNY professors, frozen in a time warp. Raising his head, he stood up and waited for Mona to introduce him. "Chief, this is Dr. Orwell. He has an appointment and he'd like to see you on a matter of importance," she added helpfully.

Inviting him into my office I motioned him to the visitor's chair in which he settled himself bolt upright, clearly ill at ease. I offered him the choice of coffee or diet soda, keeping my fingers crossed he would make the right decision. He did, visibly relaxing as he started. "Chief Adams, I apologize for not having called on you because I live just down the street at number eighteen. Mine's the unit that used to have the flower boxes on the deck until the architectural review board made me remove them. Apparently I

was violating the covenants, although I don't agree with their interpretation of section twenty-two. Do you ever get involved in zoning matters?" he inquired hopefully.

"No, I don't have the legal training for that. You might want to try Ace Ventura, Plant Detective." His bewildered expression told me he wasn't into movie trivia, so to pick up the pieces I asked cheerfully, "How may I help you?"

"I saw the police car in the driveway and I hoped I would run into you because I have some information that you may find useful. It just happens I was at the golf course right after the accident or whatever it was. At the time I was vaguely aware of something but I couldn't put my finger on it. However, yesterday when I was listening to the London Philharmonic it came back to me. It was the smell," he announced proudly.

"The smell? I didn't notice any smell," I stated factually, at a loss to see where he was heading.

"You wouldn't. I mean…" he paused, visibly reddening. "That's not being critical. It's just that the smell was very faint and it didn't occur to me right away what it was. On top of that it doesn't make any sense," he added with a puzzled expression. "Let me explain. With my doctorate and academic background in chemistry, as a government consultant I worked on a super-secret project developing explosives, the kind used by terrorists, although I was never told how they would be used. This is hardly the type of thing one talks about in the academic community, although I assume it is safe to discuss it with you. I always said I was working on rocket fuels. To make a long story short, some twenty years ago I developed a particularly effective explosive material, metallic in origin but invisible to normal detection methods. It required merely a hard jolt to set it off, a useful feature, but this also made it very dangerous to transport. In addition, it was unpredictable; hard to estimate the force of the explosion from the quantity used. Do you know anything about explosives?" he asked.

“Afraid not,” I admitted. “Happy to say, defusing bombs was never a part of my job description.”

“Well, this explosive gave off a very distinctive odor when detonated, one I hadn’t smelled for twenty years until the accident on the golf course. The smell was faint, but recognizable. There’s a remote possibility someone could have replicated my work, but the odds are very small indeed. That’s it. Makes no sense to me, but it might to you since you are in on the investigation.”

“Not really. Do you have any idea what happened to the bomb building stuff you created? I assume you aren’t carrying any around with you?” I asked facetiously, still not quite sure whether I was dealing with a nut case.

Whatever humor there was in my reply escaped the little man as he proceeded in a thoughtful, even scholarly manner. “I’m not sure how much was ever produced, but whatever I didn’t use for test purposes remained with the Federal government, that funded my research.”

“Dr. Orwell, to be honest with you, I’m not doing much in the way of investigating, and I’m as mystified as you are. But, I’d appreciate it if you wouldn’t mention this to anyone. I’ll pass on the information to the authorities. They will probably want to contact you, but that’s out of my hands. If I need any more information, I’ll let you know. We live right down the street from one another, so please feel free to drop in anytime as my wife wants us to get to know our neighbors.” Figuring that should do the job, I sat back and waited for him to leave.

“Good luck in that,” he started somewhat tentatively, gathering steam as he went along. “I’ve met many people on the island because when it became known that I was proficient in computers they started bringing them to me when things went wrong. Charging only for parts, it’s reached the point where malfunctioning machines are now left in my garage like unwanted babies at medieval monasteries. As far as making friends it hasn’t

worked because after three years on the island most of the residents still equate me with the women who come over from the mainland to cook, clean and baby sit—they provide a welcome service but you surely wouldn't want to socialize with them. I hope you won't take this the wrong way, but as an employee of the corporation you might run into the same problem." Worried he may have spoken out of turn, he awaited my answer.

"In fact, this is something my wife and I have discussed. But, I know you are appreciated and respected, and with your many interests you don't have to worry about what other people think," I concluded reassuringly in an effort to build up his self-esteem. "My wife and I would both like to hear more about your experiences and when things settle down we would like to have you over for dinner," I added, just as Mona returned the buzz I had sneaked in from my phone while his thoughts were elsewhere.

I was not sure he was totally convinced, but his expression softened. I watched his departing figure with mixed emotions. Personally, I liked the guy, although I felt for the students who had been required to sit through his lectures. And, I related to his concerns.

But, it was up to me to pass on potentially valuable information. Picking up the phone I asked Mona to get Billie on the line.

As best I could I told her about my meeting with our computer expert and bomb maker. She listened without interruption, which was unusual as busy as she was. Finally after a long pause she said she would get back to me, after which I was greeted by the dial tone, leaving me less than happy over my abortive attempt to advance the investigation.

Inviting Mona into my office I asked her to clue me in on my new best friend.

Eager to participate in the investigation, she started. "He's quiet and keeps to himself; gets more respect for what he does with

computers than he probably realizes. When he moved here three years ago he joined a little nest of ‘doctors’ who don’t have *real* doctors degrees. A lot of people look on them as phonies. But, he has genuine technical knowledge, like a physician or a dentist, you know what I mean? And, then there’s that really phony ‘doctor,’ Komputer Karyl, spelled with a ‘k’ if you like. Did his name come up in your conversation?”

“I don’t think so…” I answered uncertainly.

She then went on to explain that before Onslow’s arrival to get a computer fixed you were forced to deal with “Dr. Koresch Karyl, Electronics Specialist,” or so read his business card. He claimed to be a refugee from an obscure Eastern European republic, and doing business with him was neither convenient nor predictable. After leaving a narrow secondary highway there was the bone-jarring mile and a half ride down the rutted, overgrown dirt track leading to his rundown home-based place of business. Even if one called first there was the strong likelihood of being greeted by a tattered announcement pinned to the screen door: “So sorry. Out to Lunch. Back in 15 minutes.” The problems with the sign were Dr. Karyl was usually neither sorry, out to lunch nor likely to be back in 15 minutes. There were those who swore he simply didn’t answer the door.

For those lucky enough to establish contact with the elusive doctor, no matter what the problem described or the degree of detail provided there was but a single response. “It is a problem with your hard drive. Yes?” Despite the rising inflection accompanying the end of this statement no answer to the contrary was expected. One could then anticipate a wait of give or take three days to three weeks. Finally an invoice would be tendered, under “Corrective Action Taken” always containing the same statement “Trouble with hard drive.” As far as billing was concerned, it appeared no two customers were ever charged the same.

Given the uncertainties of dealing with Dr. Karyl, when Onslow showed up predictably this adversely affected the former’s

revenues, reportedly generating no small amount of animosity on his part. Eventually, his impact on the community was largely limited to his servicing the corporation's business computers but even that was reduced to a trickle when new competition emerged, and Em banned him from the island after he canceled the contract. Mona said, like a lot of people, she had forgotten about him.

After a long pause it seemed clear she had something further on her mind. "Boss, we need to talk about the meeting that's now less than two hours away. I hope I didn't scare you off when I said I couldn't help, but at least there are some things you need to know. Did you look at the file folder with all the petitions?"

"To be honest, I did not, having resigned myself to taking my lumps at the meeting. If you have anything, anything at all…"

"Well, it sure complicates things for tonight's meeting. It's all about Red's dogs. Actually the dogs are less of a problem than Marjory Nettles' ranting and raving?"

"Whoa! Who are Marjorie Nettles and Red?" I asked, the ranting and raving part getting my immediate, undivided attention.

Mona explained that Red was Em's younger brother who ran the EMTs and the fire department, and that it was all part of the ongoing feud between Red and the wicked witch of the south, Marjorie Nettles. It started on the day she moved in when she claimed the island's parking regulations were illegal after she left her car in a fire zone. After numerous warnings Red used an old tow truck housed at the fire station to impound her nonconforming vehicle. Losing an appeal hearing at which she vociferously represented herself, Ms. Nettles reluctantly redeemed her property and then turned to the internet to help her piece together a series of legal challenges to community covenants and regulations. Currently she was contesting areas in Wildwood being reserved for younger adults with families, seeking to purchase property there even though she hated children, plus she had hired an architect to develop plans for a windmill in her front yard.

The biggest shots in the war were directed at Red's dogs. As part of the deal he had with his brother, Red was provided rent-free a three bedroom condo in Palmdale. This created the problem, because Red with his country ways liked to hunt with dogs—not just one or two—but a whole pack. While other people had swing sets, barbeques and patio furniture in their back yards, Red had dog cages. Pretty soon two cages turned into four, and Dr. Seusslike four turned into more, stacked one on top of another. Sensing a chink in her adversary's armor, Ms. Nettles capitalized on the neighbors' not unreasonable response to the visual, auditory and olfactory pollution created by Red's actions. With outdoor barbequing in full swing, in the longest town meeting in history Mr. Jones sought to resolve the issue by giving his younger brother a three-acre tract in the far reaches of the undeveloped land south of Wildwood, where he was instructed to house his canines.

Initially this was a happy solution for all concerned. But eventually, Red, with the consequences of letting nature take its course found himself providing room and board for upwards of thirty largely undisciplined animals. However, twice a day he visited the sprawling chain link-fenced compound to care for his hunting companions, a chosen few periodically bundled into the cages stacked in the back of his monster truck as dictated by the various hunting seasons.

In their isolated domain the dogs no longer posed a threat to the community. But, Marjory Nettles, a self-proclaimed animal rights activist, decided to use them as pawns in her war with the establishment. She would have remained a voice crying in the wilderness had she not been successful in linking up with what she called her "action team." This was a loosely organized collection of protestors, mostly from the mainland, exhibiting varying degrees of interest, commitment and militancy. The militant ones were the problem—and one moonless evening, shortly before my arrival on the scene, they had released Red's animal population into the surrounding countryside. Unfortunately it violated the island's leash and animal control laws, and, even worse, lit up the phone

lines at the security office within minutes of the first sighting. The ensuing confusion as the island's rentacops used fishing nets in a weeklong campaign to round up the happy escapees, she explained, was a major reason for Mr. Jones' decision to terminate the security contract in favor of yours truly, in whose court the ball now resided.

Had this been a memo it would have immediately gone into my "Too Hard" box. Overdosed on bad news, I thanked Mona saying that since she had to be at the meeting tonight why didn't she take the rest of the day off. She took me up on my offer.

I knew tonight was going to be an ordeal and I had to get busy. I turned on the computer. The blue-backed playing cards flew across the bright green screen and I carefully placed the red ten on the black jack.

I was ready.

CHAPTER 11—SUMMIT MEETING

Arriving an hour early I stationed myself at the front lobby leading into the multi-purpose activity room on the third floor of the clubhouse that could handle corporate meetings and banquets, as well as accommodate a “big band” for Saturday night dances. Tonight its rows of plush, padded stack chairs were set up for more than two hundred, not enough given the steady stream of people arriving. Working the crowd like the precinct captain in my old neighborhood I was surprised when people lined up to shake my hand, give me a hug or offer words of encouragement. I sought to personally greet as many of them as possible. It was a varied group: young, old, families, some with small children, suits and ties, cutoffs and jeans, a few bearing notebooks and pads, and one I noticed in particular—an impassive, aging woman toting a bulging expanding file, shapeless sack passing for a dress, mean mouth, granny glasses and gray hair pulled back in a knot so tight it stretched her eyebrows. I didn’t have to ask, that was Marjorie Nettles!

Mr. Jones arrived right on time, proceeding directly to the podium and calling the meeting to order in one continuous motion. He launched into what I correctly assumed would be a short no-nonsense introduction. Then I’d be on the hot seat.

“My fellow residents. Welcome. This is a wonderful turnout, I’m told our largest ever. If those standing will be patient we are setting up more seats as fast as we can. It is gratifying to see so many people have the best interests of the community at heart. Along with you I am deeply disturbed by last Monday’s tragedy on our golf course and the cowardly attacks on our country. Fortunately we have on staff as Chief of Security, Charley Adams, a veteran police officer from New York City. So, I’d like to turn the meeting over to him.” Unbelievably, the audience rose as one and, totally unexpected, gave me a long, standing ovation. Since I had just been hired and knew but a handful of those present I could only attribute this to the current mass media feeding frenzy focusing on the heroism of my former colleagues who risked and gave their lives in responding to the terrorist attacks.

Looking over the wildly applauding audience I couldn’t help but notice Mel brushing a tear from her eye, and my boss, Em the Second, looking as if he had flicked a light switch and released a thunderbolt. Pulling myself together I felt the adrenalin flow, and my battle plan started to unfold as I leaned forward into the microphone.

“I want to thank you all for the warm reception tonight. But it’s not me you should be applauding, but rather the brave police, firefighters, clergy and emergency workers this week who made the supreme sacrifice in face of cowardly and unexpected assaults on our way of life. Let us all with heads bowed observe a moment of silence for these true patriots.” Pausing momentarily before lowering my own head I was pleased to note universal compliance, proving the “A” I had received in Speech 101 was no fluke. Raising my head and looking over the house I anticipated no problems as continued somberly, head slowly turning, seeking to maximize eye contact.

“It’s been a real pleasure getting to meet so many of you tonight. As a resident of this community I’m as concerned as you over the dastardly attack on our nation, and like you I am also disturbed by

the violence on the golf course here where we live. I want you to know I've been working night and day with local law enforcement authorities to find the perpetrator of this violent, senseless act." I saw heads nodding in agreement as I went on, lowering my voice as if providing the audience privileged information.

"I have been in close contact with the Altima county sheriff's office in every stage of the current investigation. But I must remind you final authority for the case lies with the sheriff, using the community college's crime lab and various other agencies, state and federal, as appropriate. So I am necessarily limited in what I may say tonight, and I am not empowered to speak for those other jurisdictions." Taking the microphone with me I then walked to the front of the stage and stretched to my full height, ready to take my best shot.

"Let me try to separate fact from fiction," I said. "Fact. A visitor from our executive education center lost his life from the effects of an explosive device triggered by his golf swing. Question. Why would anyone want to frighten, injure or kill the victim, a retired businessman from the state of Pennsylvania? Fiction. This is part of a campaign of terror aimed at our country and our community. Even though terrorism dominates our thoughts and there have been rumors to this effect, I have no reason to believe we will suffer further murderous attacks. Nor do I know of any evidence linking this act of terror to those elsewhere. Fact: all applicable law enforcement agencies are using all available resources investigating this tragedy. True! But, remember with clear links to the situation up North our local authorities are stretched extremely thin. As the investigation unfolds, I encourage anyone here to call my office and we will bring you up to date with everything in the public domain. Further, I wish to apologize for any inconvenience you may have suffered and assure you that I and the people working for me will do everything we can to respect your wishes and keep you safe. Our motto is we protect and serve, and we all take it very seriously." Noting the audience's rapt attention and having run out of reassuring statements, hoping the element of surprise would

operate in my favor I concluded abruptly, “But, I’ve taken enough of your time. It’s your meeting; your turn. The floor is now open for questions.”

Pausing to pour myself a glass of water from the carafe on the podium I allowed a number of people to put up their hands and scanning the audience I tried to pick out those who would potentially pose the fewest problems.

In short order I fielded a series of inquiries, more like a press conference than a homeowners meeting. These included: type of explosive, which I ducked, age and occupation of the deceased, whether he was related to anyone local or had friends in the area, was the golf course safe, were there FBI agents on the island, were there any suspects, and, finally, why weren’t explosive-sniffing dogs used in the investigation? I said I didn’t know.

Any further discussion of the crime ended when the woman with the expanding file, who I had purposely ignored to this point, leaped to her feet identifying herself as head of the local animal rights group. Her taut features and distended eyes projected an image of revolutionary zeal, and with her speech punctuated with exclamation points she addressed the now restless crowd, volume turned up to ten, white knuckles gripping the back of the chair in front of her. “I am shocked, shocked, I repeat, by all this concern about a possible crime, a possible prank, against someone totally unknown to us when right here on our island there are crimes every day perpetrated against poor defenseless creatures by those protected by the mantle of executive privilege. You all know what I’m talking about!”

Apparently most everyone did, because people started leaving in increasingly large numbers. Uncertain how to react to her disjointed comments I used the confusion of the moment to look to my boss for help. Nodding, he rose to take the podium and address the persons still seated, but seeing his brother striding purposefully toward the front of the room he wordlessly returned to his seat. Distinctly uneasy and clutching the podium, his top shirt collar

button open and tie askew, Red haltingly addressed the suddenly alert onlookers who remained. “I have never been unsympathetic to the rights of anyone, human or animal. I love my dogs and mistreatment of them under the cover of darkness is more than I can bear. So, I want you to know I have made arrangements through a vet to house ten or twelve of my favorites, and the rest will be relocated to good homes. Then perhaps I won’t be bothered by nighttime trespassers on my property. You know who you are—and so do I. Now, let’s put an end to this foolishness and get home at a decent hour,” he said wearily as he left the podium in the direction of the exit, Ms. Nettles’ passionate objections drowned out by the babble of the departing crowd.

Taking advantage of the ensuing confusion, a surprised Emlyn Jones hurriedly adjourned the meeting and joined the others now leaving the facility. Walking up the aisle with Mel we were joined by my administrative assistant. I told her that I could hardly wait for Monday morning so she could clue me in on what had really happened. She assured me she would, noting, “There’s a lot more to this than meets the eye.”

Keyed up and not ready to return home after my hour of triumph I suggested we splurge on banana splits at the Island Pharmacy’s turn-of-the-century soda fountain replete with stained glass cabinets, marble-topped counter, and chromium bar stools. While waiting to be seated, several people presented themselves to shake my hand, a repeat of the performance in the lobby. Mel was also courteously received, one stately matron observing, “You must be very proud of him!” Some unknown person had also responded in a different way because when we came to the cash register there wasn’t any check.

Overdosed on compliments, we returned home flipping through the channels until we realized that sleep would not be readily forthcoming. It remained for Mel to start the ball rolling. “Charley. It’s not just what happened in New York, but I’m finding it hard to believe how much our lives have changed in less than a week.

Those people tonight were unreal. A few days ago you were just a rentacop, probably not much higher in the pecking order than the janitors, and all of a sudden you are Superhero."

"I know, Hon," I replied. "What happened last Tuesday on top of the little guy getting blown away the day before seems to have destroyed any sense they once had of personal security. Remember we're living in Paradise. I may be a caped crusader now but deep down inside I'm still what I was for sixteen years—a uniformed street cop. When I turned on the TV Tuesday morning it struck me: cops, *real* cops, are different, in a class by themselves. Like when people meet you and they find out you're a cop they either back off, as if they have something to fear because of the authority you possess, or they act real friendly figuring it might not be a bad idea if they ever got into trouble. You know what I mean?"

"I sure do," Mel replied thoughtfully. "And some of that rubs off on the wife, too. I've noticed this when playing cards or with friends and neighbors. But what you didn't mention is the way many people look on cops in general, like the pushers on the street or some of those people at the marches and rallies. They just plain hate cops, or at least act like they do. I'm not sure all this has changed in less than a week."

"Yeah, I haven't forgotten that. I don't have to tell you, places like Brooklyn were once a series of neighborhoods, like small towns today. Cops like my father swinging their nightsticks knew just about all there was to know about the areas they patrolled. Like members of a fraternity they created their own closed worlds built around their jobs, families and co-workers. In the old days it wasn't a bad life, and I guess we got some respect. Heck, kids even played cop games. But, by the time I left it was a totally different ballgame. I watched along with you and the other guys as crime, guns and drugs exploded on the street while it became tougher and tougher to do one's job. As time passed some of them quit, most of them rolled with the flow, more than we realized went into twelve-step programs and a terminally disturbed few ate their service

revolvers. Sure, 9/11 let people see what cops are really like when the heat's on. But, how long is the picnic going to last? I don't care how many pictures they show of cops leading people out of burning buildings, deep down inside cops are still looked on as cops. Maybe people now have a more realistic idea of what the job's like, but with television when you're no longer on the evening news people's memories fade real fast, so don't count on a lifetime of dinner invitations out by the beach."

"No I wasn't!" she countered quickly, her grin overshadowed by no small measure of skepticism. "Maybe that's because we really don't belong here, we're just employees and everyone knows it."

"Yeah, possibly that's it. I'm probably oversensitive. But, enough of this. While I'm not sleepy, it's been a long day and I've had about all the heavy thinking I can take."

"Me, too" Mel said wearily. On the way upstairs squaring my shoulders and with firm tread I recalled the waves of emotion which I felt from the prolonged applause and rapt attention of the audience. Maybe their respect would fade with time, but there was one thing of which I was certain.

The caped crusader mantle might not fit, but my days as a rentacop were over!

CHAPTER 12—FOOD! GLORIOUS FOOD!

The following morning the weatherman's predictions of more than an inch and a half of rain appeared right on target, with the tag end of Hurricane "Gabrielle" the culprit. Uniform trousers pressed against my legs by the gusting winds that slammed the office door behind me, I arrived to find the guy from the afternoon before still on duty, yet to be relieved. I told him he still had a job if he could get someone there inside of thirty minutes. Mona enjoyed the whole thing enormously, as tired as I was with the Coastal's abysmal track record when it came to supplying us with security officers, a problem I had promised to address as soon as things let up a little. Calling Mona into my office, I had her close the door, asking her to tell me exactly what happened at last night's meeting.

"Boss, what can I say when it came to how you handled that group? Instead let me start with Red and his dogs. I was genuinely surprised by Red's backing down in public and the relocation of his animals. I guess he's just tired of fighting that woman. Personally, I think she's nuts." she concluded distastefully.

"While on the topic of Red, I know he is Em's brother, and he runs the EMT's, but tell me about him."

"Well, his real name is Homer Winslow Jones and he spent two years at the University of Miami playing football, *real* football, not just for fun like his brother, plus he was also on the baseball team. He quit college to go to spring training with the New York Yankees somewhere in Florida where he was assigned to some sort of rookie league. But, he quit to come home and play golf, go fishing, hunting, things like that. He's also a ham radio operator, even has a tower that the neighbors complain is illegal, but nothing happens. Em gives him a free condo and he is head of the island fire department, for which he gets paid. But, he did go through EMT training, and after he got certified Em bought him a fancy emergency vehicle to transport people to the hospital on the mainland. I have to admit that he takes that job really seriously and he has helped save more than one person's life. But, despite the valuable services he provides and while he is a Jones with full

access to the island's facilities, people don't give him the time of day, not because he isn't sociable, but because he prefers his dogs and his hunting and fishing buddies over his brother's highfalutin' friends. Get what I mean?" she asked.

Not sure how useful further gossip might be in figuring out what really happened at the meeting I remained silent to see what else she might have to say. Visibly ill at ease, eyes locked on mine she finally added, "Boss, I just want to tell you how good I felt about the way the meeting went and you had a lot to do with it. Usually those who show up just run off at the mouth and fight over nothing. Maybe what happened last week got the residents attention. I sure hope so. In a matter of days I've sensed a change in their attitudes —focusing on like what's important rather than just themselves. I've always thought this place is well named: a haven for those who don't want to live in the real world. Now they feel they're under attack, from overseas and from some crazy killer who they may be passing on the street every day. So, they're shook up, and with the local cops busy elsewhere right now you're the one they look on to set things right again. I know you won't let them down, and I'll do all I can to help. I hope you realize that."

I told her I did, deeply moved by her remarks. With the near-silent phone and steady rain I then redirected my energy to the phone messages on my desk. None of them interested me. Shortly after eleven, at loose ends Mona buzzed in with a phone call, from Billie.

"Charley, please listen carefully," she started, suggesting either very good or very bad news was to follow. "I want you to head up the coastal highway to meet me for lunch at noon. Normally it would take fifteen minutes but double that as the weather is still crappy. I've given your secretary or whatever she is the directions plus your car phone number if you get lost. I will be waiting for you, and please, don't be late. It's very important," she said as the line went dead.

My anxiety index elevated beyond belief, I asked Mona if she could tell me anything about the restaurant and she merely replied that it featured sea food and was out of her price range. Questioning her further I asked if Billie had given her any other information, and I thought somewhat evasively she said she had not.

The road was nearly deserted and with the wind whipping up the waves pounding the coast I was glad I had left early. Peering through the deluge I finally spotted the eatery located a respectful distance from the ocean, its sign sporting a neon-lit lobster which after counting the number of its claws I decided was way out of its territory. Shaking the raindrops from my slicker I was relieved to find Billie waiting patiently, surrounded by a smattering of locals and a larger number of vacationers trapped in weekly rentals. Many appeared to be suffering from cabin fever with out-of-control kids for whom I assumed the experience was part of their home schooling.

“Great! I was afraid you’d be late. Follow me,” she said authoritatively, leading me down a hall to where she threw open a door into a private dining room. To my amazement I scanned the assembled group around the banquet table that included several uniformed sheriff’s deputies, my boss, a couple of dudes in civilian clothes that cried out cop, and a tall guy that I recognized as Sheriff Perkins, with my wife, Mel, seated beside him!

“All Rise!” he exhorted in his best command voice. Chairs scraping the floor all in attendance obeyed, remaining silent while Billie led me to take my place on the other side of the sheriff. “Today we are here today for the swearing in of a new deputy, Charley Adams. After reviewing the records of his sixteen years of loyal service to the New York City police department, rising to the rank of sergeant, we find that the exams and certifications he achieved along the way more than satisfy the requirements of the state of Florida Department of Law Enforcement to join us as a deputy sheriff. While we will share him with his good boss, we urgently

need his help in dealing with the tragedy out on the island. Recognizing the high regard with which we regard you, Charley, I'd like to present you this deputy's badge that when you wear it gives you the full power of my office in carrying out your duties as Chief of Security." Stepping forward he removed the silver badge I wore and replaced it with a gold one from the county. At this point the entire room broke into applause and as if on cue all those present from the department lined up to shake my hand, Mel at the end giving me a big hug.

Starting with the small talk route, I got my first up-close look at my new boss, face suntanned with crow's feet accenting iron-gray steely eyes that asked questions, deeply lined face, styled Brillo pad-hair streaked with gray, smartly tailored uniform jacket, emanating self-confidence. With duty calling lunch went quickly, our seafood platters soon arriving and with Sheriff Perkins bringing Mel and Billie seated to my left into the conversation. As the room emptied the sheriff asked me to stay behind.

"Charley, I'm glad we finally get to meet without being distracted by a seriously dead guy," he started. "How do you like our weather compared to Brooklyn?"

Deciding to go on the attack, I asked, "Sheriff Perkins, maybe you can clear up something for me. Everywhere I go people seem to know my life story. How come?"

"That's probably a natural consequence of dealing with Emlyn Jones the Second," he said laughing. "Em may give the impression of being laid back but underneath he's a mover and shaker who doesn't leave anything to chance. He knows how to manipulate people and he makes it a point to find out everything about those around him—his own employees at the top of the list. He may have just hired you, but I'll bet he knows stuff about you you've forgotten, or maybe you'd like to forget. He's a shrewd judge of people and when he spends a dollar he gets his money's worth. That megabucks complex out in the ocean didn't just happen. He's brought it every step of the way and it's his whole life. He's not

interested in much else, except maybe his golf and his boat that he guards like an overprotective mother with a teen-age daughter. You may think he's laid back but he's hard as nails underneath. You'll find that out," he concluded knowingly.

Unsure of where this was leading I waited for him to continue. “Don’t worry, with your experience you won’t have any problems with Em. But, what’s happened on your island has created problems for me, and your expedited certification today I hope will help solve them. While I want you to partner with Sgt. Greene, I assume you have no problems with that, I still want you to report to me personally. I say this because yesterday I was contacted by an agent out of Jacksonville and he wants me to set up a contact with the Bureau, insisting that it be someone who is on the scene as far as the tragedy is concerned. So, you’re it, and I have every confidence that you will cover my back. There’s no need to report to me every step of the way, just don’t sign off on anything I can’t live with. I’ve cleared this with Sgt. Green and she’s comfortable with the situation and you can share everything with her. You will be getting your uniforms, which you should wear when on duty with us, although when you put on the chief’s hat I would suggest you still wear our badge and belt with the sidearm if you think that’s necessary. Now hear this. Monday you have a two o’ clock appointment with one agent Drummond in Jacksonville. The call him ‘Bulldog.’ This is a direct result of the information that you turned up about the explosive, that I communicated to him yesterday. He specifically asked for you because of your background and the fact you are based on the island. Actually, that’s what started the ball rolling with the ceremony today, in fact it was his idea. I’ve never met him but after talking to him on the phone you two should get along fine, he’s from the North, too. Your assistant has all the details, take care of her she’s a good one, should have hired her when we had the chance. Had planned to steal her away, but I’m backing off as you need all the help you can get right now.”

Walking me out to the parking lot the sheriff patted me on the back, telling me again not to worry. Last week for the first time in nearly twenty years I was out of work. Now, I had not one, but two jobs, and two bosses. In my way of thinking, that's a whole lot to worry about.

CHAPTER 13—You're My Friend

Saturday morning I woke up early and rolling over in bed I breathed a sigh of relief when I called to find the night man reporting nothing out of order so far on his shift. The water on our deck told me the rain was still with us, although the weatherman predicted that tomorrow we could expect a sunny day, only the third this month. Thus started a quiet day at home, highlighted by the Avon Calling front door chimes in late afternoon announcing

the arrival of a deputy from the mainland in civilian clothes who I recognized from the day before. Arms laden with packages he greeted me by name.

“Charley, great to have you on board. Here’s the stuff that you need to get started. If you’ve got time I’ll help you sort it out and answer any questions you might have.” Proceeding inside, he was greeted by Mel who said that if he was off-duty how would he like a beer. He accepted gladly taking out a small pocket knife to open the largest package.

“There’s more on order, but for starters here are your summer outfits, that we wear most of the year. We had to guess at the size but it looks like we were right on,” he said, rising to hold up the green outfit emblazoned with the blue and gold shoulder patch. A CSI jumpsuit and two khaki shirts followed and then opening a smaller box he held up a utility belt together with the usual attachments plus a smaller, heavy package he gave me to open. Inside I found wrapped in tissue paper a brand new Glock. I hefted the firearm, feel and balance akin to an extension of my arm. Not only was I now a real cop, but they had spared no expense in outfitting me for the job. If there was a down side, it was clear that now the pressure was on me to live up to the sheriff’s expectations.

Finishing his beer the deputy respectfully declined Mel’s supper invite, mentioning that he and his wife would be having us over soon for a barbeque at which we could meet with other families from the force.

As the door closed behind him I think Mel summed it all up, saying emotionally “Charley, I can’t believe it. In just one week we’ve not only found us a house, but I feel like we may also have found us a home.”

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Sunday arrived with the promised badly needed sunshine, and at Mel’s urging I called the golf pro to see if he could fix me up with

my first round ever on the Links at Paradise Cay. He told me Red had called to say he was looking for a game and we could be squeezed in. I met Red on the putting green, far more comfortably dressed and less stressed than Thursday night.

“Really liked how you handled the meeting. Hear you’re a good golfer. Grab your clubs, we’re up next,” he said, heading for his golf cart. Wordlessly he secured my bag and when we jerkily started down the path to the first tee it suddenly hit me—the awful scene still etched in my memory. What got to me most were the flowers as I fought to regain my composure. With a sideways glance I could see that my partner shared similar emotions, as with lips pursed he jammed on the brakes with eyes looking downward with a vacant stare.

“Sorry,” he said, finally breaking the silence. “As an EMT I thought I’d seen everything but this was positively the worst. I’m sure that it was just as bad for you. It’s part of our jobs so be glad it’s over. Let’s put it behind us and focus on the game. What say….?” he concluded .

In front of us was a couple and their teenage son with his own set of tour-quality clubs who was ten to fifteen strokes better than either of his parents, and who could outdrive his father by at least a hundred yards. Inasmuch as the course was filled to capacity there was no point in playing through and we adjusted to the slow pace of play. While waiting for the green to clear on the long par five seventh hole, out of the blue Red started, “I assume you’ve been exposed to the company line—cleaned up stories about me, my family and how the Paradise project got off the ground. Let me fill you in—help you separate fact from fiction.” He then proceeded to do so, sandwiched in between shots and while waiting, our match overshadowed by the remarkable story he told.

He explained his father came from one of the many formerly well-to-do families impoverished by the great depression. After graduating from high school the only job he could find was as a plumber’s helper, working for the grand sum of twenty-five cents

an hour. Three years later, right after Pearl Harbor he joined the Navy, soon to be assigned to a destroyer in the South Pacific. After having two of his commands blown out from under him, and twice decorated for valor, he was eventually discharged with a slight limp and a couple of hundred dollars which in a marathon poker game on the ship going home turned into several thousand. He then returned to civilian life with a twenty-year-old wife acquired a year earlier while on shore leave and who had given birth to his son, Emlyn II.

Fortunately, as Red put it, his dad was “a good plumber with an attitude” who soon realized building houses was far more profitable than installing bathroom fixtures. Savings from jobs he never turned down plus his windfall earnings augmented through investments set him up in business for himself and he obtained his general contracting license when the Florida east coast building boom was just starting. In short order he graduated to small-scale commercial projects, then a modest arterial shopping mall.

He was on his way, however, when he convinced the developer of a small theme park he could handle the outdoor aquatic exhibits. From this humble beginning he earned a reputation as someone who could turn swampland into a variety of habitats, including crocodile-infested rivers, watering holes for groupings of fully-animated wild animals, jungle villages with demonstrably unfriendly natives, and the like. The pipes he installed now carried refrigerant to cool tropical species crowded into plywood-enclosed jungles with painted backdrops of the Serengeti Plains. With the cash flow this generated he then diversified his burgeoning contracting business in yet another direction, the construction of oceanfront motels and resort hotels.

At age sixty, when many men think of retirement, Emlyn Senior was leasing a lavishly outfitted helicopter together with uniformed pilot to ferry him around to his construction sites, now scattered over four states. It was on one of these trips he learned that his wife of more than thirty years, Abigail, lost her life in an auto accident.

At this point, increasingly uncomfortable with the direction his narrative was taking, having finished the front nine Red suggested we have lunch in the Horizon Grill and he would tell me the rest of his life story. Fred was on duty and found us a table overlooking the course and we let him choose us a couple of Sam Adams seasonal beers that he said were keeping the taps flowing. When we were ready for lunch he said he would pick us out a couple of steaks and see they were cooked to our specifications.

After our beers arrived in sports bar mugs, Red continued with his life story. “Charley, before we go any further, you have to understand we were never close as a family. A lot had to do with timing. My brother’s birth was a big deal, what with the war winding down and everyone looking forward to the future.” I resisted the urge to interrupt when a long silence preceded his next words. “I came along in nineteen-sixty five; and with all the negative feelings about Viet Nam I was an afterthought. When I was little I had a nanny, I’d guess you’d call it. After my mother’s death I was shipped off to a prep school in Virginia. I never thought so at the time, but this was what eventually shaped the rest of my life. There were a lot of rich kids at my school, and I didn’t have much in common with them. Granted, my father probably could have bought out most of them, but we had what many called “new” money, while theirs was “old” money, passed down from generation to generation and which they didn’t have to earn. This made them snooty and the only reason they even tolerated me was because I was a jock, a walk-on and big for my age, who started at tight end on the football team. Since we were in a prep league, this meant the kids I played against were just like the ones that turned me off at my own school. So, when called on to I delivered savage but legal blocks when the play went elsewhere, while I ran defenders into the ground when the ball came my direction. It was my reputation as a bad-ass that after graduation got me a football scholarship to the University of Miami,

“Now, remember I warned you that I wanted to correct the record when it comes to things you might have heard about me, like some

of the stuff that came from Perdido High grads, of which your assistant, Mona, is one. I'm not knocking her, she's a sweet thing who used to have a crush on me, but she simply wasn't my type. First of all, I wasn't a big college football star at Miami. In my first two years I was used primarily as a blocker, caught a total of six passes, and was never higher than fourth on the depth chart. You may also have heard I played baseball, but in fact I appeared in but only a few games and was cut at the end of my freshman year, probably because with my smart mouth I kept asking the coach why he wouldn't play me at first base, a position occupied by his son who sported a batting average under two hundred and had six errors besides.

"Also going around is that after leaving Miami a year later I played baseball for the New York Yankees. Nothing could be further from the truth. In my brief college career I hit seven home runs in five games, all but two as a pinch hitter. It just happened that I lucked out in one of my at-bats getting ahold of one for what some people said was the longest hit ever in the history of the stadium. Anyhow, after the game there was a guy in the stands who said that he was a New York scout, and he gave me a Yankee cap after promising me he'd get me a tryout for a rookie team someplace up north. Anyhow, I never heard from him and later learned that he never worked for the Yankees or any other team, but he was in fact a free-lancer who tried to peddle his so-called "finds" to anyone he could get to listen, usually with little or no success.

So, after the football season ended at Miami I came home and my father gave me a free condo and a small allowance in return for doing odd jobs, which left me plenty of time to do the things that turned me on: like playing golf, fishing and hunting, the last two of which helped keep food on the table, tastily prepared by a series of young ladies, including your assistant. What ended anything between us was when I hooked up with her best friend, CeeCee Wenthworth, who was trained as a professional chef and who could sneak in some really high-end stuff left over from some of the big bucks corporate banquets. Please, I'm not a crook and we are an

item now, and besides with the firehouse and the EMT's plus parking administration I really do earn my keep. Some say I am wasting my life, that as a family member I should have a big-bucks management job, but my time is largely my own doing the things I like best. So, let them talk; it doesn't bother me"

Just then, our food order arrived, and we went back to golf talk. I didn't push him anymore and we finished the back nine with small talk, much of it revolving around golf and the differences between living in the North and the South. In the process I gained the distinct impression there was a lot more substance to Red than one would assume on the basis of his simple country ways. Even though we had grown up in different parts of the country, in fact we had a lot in common. And, it went far beyond golf. We were close in age and neither of us had capitalized on the promise we had shown as high school athletes. While I had graduated from college, we both had benefited from self-education, books and the internet. Finally, in the workplace we both had never really made much use of what talents we had, although I had embarked on a career of sorts. Because of this, I suspected, we were often written off socially and intellectually as having little substance.

But, wasn't it Harvey Penick who said "You play golf—you're my friend!"

CHAPTER 14—BULLDOG DRUMMIN’

Monday morning, figuring I was now working for the county I changed into my new uniform, finally deciding to leave my weapon home because I wasn’t sure I could take it into a federal building. Mel made me a special breakfast, eggs, hash browns and Canadian bacon, on the way out the door supplemented by a bagful of donuts to sustain me on my trip. Arriving at the office, I found a noisy group celebrating my promotion, and joining them to be polite I sampled some of the breakfast goodies plus two cups of coffee I didn’t need. After the party ended, shortly thereafter pleading the need for an early start I headed out to crank up the cruiser, on the seat beside me someone had placed the boxed up donuts and sticky buns left over from the celebration.

Headed north on the coastal highway, chosen over the frantic lane changing and tailgating on I-95, early on I noticed the varied reactions people had to the police vehicle after observing it in their rear view mirror. Most of those who needed to immediately slowed down, while quite a few traveling within the posted limit slowed down even more. Their reactions after getting a good look at the cruiser were even more interesting. Some continued at their law-abiding pace unsure of my jurisdiction, while the more adventuresome sped by, a few brave souls giving me the finger as

they passed. The mass media's focus on cops as heroes apparently didn't carry over when it came to the enforcement of traffic laws. So, what else is new?

Happily, the radio had not been removed from the cruiser and idly I scanned across the dial to find it heavily populated with top-forty and country music wailers with the loudest wailing coming from those reporting on the reopened stock market's worst one-day point drop in history. Not having an ownership stake in corporate America left me unaffected by the news, free to contemplate why I was heading into a situation for which I was not qualified on the basis of either experience or position. But, if anything went wrong I gained some comfort from the fact that it was really my boss, the sheriff, who gave me the assignment in the first place. Dispelling such thoughts I caught in passing what was clearly John Coltrane, in fact part of "A Love Supreme." With a classic jazz channel to entertain me the time passed quickly until I reached the final turns in Mona's computerized map that got me to my destination well ahead of time but failed to mention the difficulty of finding a parking place.

I still arrived half an hour early for my appointment, only to wait that long again before I was ushered into the no-nonsense office of Agent George Drummond. He was conservatively dressed in a dark suit, button-down white shirt and a drab patterned tie, no bare skin showing above his black socks. In his late thirties, possibly early forties, he was maybe five feet nine and slight of build, rimless glasses dominating a face with a weak chin, mouse-brown thinning straight hair, and dull expressionless eyes. One of them appeared slightly out of focus, the faint outline of a two-inch scar extending below his ear suggesting his optical malfunction might have occurred in the line of duty. Billie had told me he could pass unnoticed in a crowd, which I could believe. She also said he held a black belt in karate and he knew twenty ways to kill a person with his bare hands. She had assured me he was competent and could be trusted. Face to face I wasn't so sure.

“Charley,” he started, peering at my name tag, “You are here today because with all the time and effort that has been expended on this case you have provided the only concrete lead to date on the explosive. I want you to be my primary contact point with what is happening on the island, and I leave it up to you to keep Sgt. Greene and Sheriff Perkins updated on what is going on. Otherwise, what is said in this room stays in this room. Do we understand each other?” he asked, his good eye locked on mine.

“Perfectly,” I replied.

“Fine. Given your experience in law enforcement I’m not going to waste time telling you how we operate. Instead I’m going to focus on our role in the current investigation and explain how you are uniquely qualified to help us out. You’ve probably surmised the Bureau’s involvement is why you have received so little information about the explosive in question. In fact, other than knowing that it was based on a compound no longer of interest to the military, without going into detail we had no idea who created it. You came up with Dr. Orwell and now it seems certain he was indeed the inventor of the explosive—easy to produce and highly effective, but extremely unstable. The army lost interest in it, and a couple of years later in a routine inventory of classified materials some turned up missing. That was when we were notified and asked to be on the lookout if it resurfaced, for example, in terrorist attacks, which were less than a national priority at the time. We sent a flyer to crime labs detailing its chemical makeup and telling them to let us know if it surfaced in an investigation. After all this time you can imagine how surprised we were to get a hit from coastal Florida when the explosive showed up on your golf course the day *before* the 9/11 attacks. Even more surprising, the explosive agent was used in an apparently senseless act of violence against the most unlikely of victims. Could this have been a field test of something to be used in later attacks? That’s the key question we want you to help us answer. In addition we have another name we want you to check out...Dr. Philip Myers, a nuclear scientist who is also a resident of your happy little island. The link is extremely

tenuous, but it appears he and Dr. Orwell in the early eighties were members of a Presidential task force to produce a report on the role of scientists as advocates for social change. Best I can tell the group met a half dozen times or so over a two-year period, spending most of their time preparing individual contributions to the final report. That's all for the specifics. Do you see now why we are interested? Given you have a bomb builder and a nuclear scientist on board, this puts you in the forefront as far as helping us out in an investigation with major national security issues."

Before the federal agent could continue I hastened to put in my two-cents worth. "I'll do the best I can, but I'm new to the job, and there are like four hundred people on the island plus a lot more go through the gate every day. All I have to help me is a bunch of rentacops that come in when they feel like it, and the only decent equipment I have is a made-for -TV patrol car. Frankly, I don't see how I am uniquely qualified to help you out in any way, shape or form," I concluded, throwing in a few facts and a very strong close.

"I totally appreciate your concerns, but I am also in a position to help you out and make your job a whole lot easier. When your system at the gate is up and running this should give you a handle on who comes and goes. If we sent someone in there to snoop around it would be pretty obvious. So we'd like you to tighten security at the gate, keeping a record of both residents and non-residents going through the gate, requiring valid ID's for the latter. Plus, we want you, at least temporarily, to use off-duty sheriff's deputies as shift supervisors at night. Any problems so far?" he asked, eying me expectantly.

"Two huge ones," I started. "First, to completely control access at the gate would require an expensive computerized system and so far I'm having problems getting a new blotter for my desk. Second, the sheriff made me promise I wouldn't make any binding commitments and reassigning deputies would get me in deep trouble."

“Not to worry, this has all been cleared with Mr. Jones and Sheriff Perkins, who is actually going to pick up most of the tab from funds he has to help deal with drugs and in this case explosives coming in from the coast. What I’m asking is you be our eyes and ears on this one. Try to stay in the office as little as possible. Draw on your experience as a cop and get back on the street. In short, you’ll be conducting your own war on terror. By now you should be getting some idea of how things work and where to look, giving you a big advantage over us. Now, I’m afraid I’ve monopolized the conversation. Any questions?”

“Not right now. But, if something comes up, how do I get in touch with you?”

“Good point,” he noted. Reaching across the desk he handed me his business card. “Here’s how to contact me. If you need me in a hurry I have added my beeper number, which I normally don’t give out. At this point you’re on your own,” he said flatly, rising to indicate our meeting was at an end. Standing up myself it was apparent I had a good six inches on him in height, but the force of his personality was overwhelming. I left his turf, hat in hand if I hadn’t left it in the cruiser.

Heading back south on the highway my mind was bombarded with questions that I wished I’d asked. Agent Drummond had given me a good deal of information and I was pleased by his confidence in me. But, despite his apparent friendliness and openness he had skillfully controlled the interview, after all, he questioned people for a living. Granted, I was glad to see the investigation moving off dead center, and it appeared that I was now included in the information loop. But, I wasn’t convinced that the little man with the wayward eye hadn’t sold me a bill of goods.

Hours later when unable to sleep I sat on the deck listening to the sounds of the night, it occurred to me that Sheriff Perkins and my boss had conveniently forgot to mention the deals they had already made for the entry system and the night supervisors.

That being the case, I wondered, what had my meeting accomplished?

CHAPTER 15—The “Gator” Problem

Tuesday morning it was partly cloudy, suggesting we might receive some relief from the heat and humidity. I arrived at the office early to catch up on paperwork. The night man greeted me with the activity report, exclaiming happily, “Here it is Chief,

another quiet night. The word is out that we are getting a security system to control traffic at the gate. Do you think that will help if those Arabs try to attack us again?”

After pointing out the odds against any further attack were extremely small, the new system I said would make us even more secure. This seemed to satisfy him and because it was too early to update my boss on yesterday’s meeting in Jacksonville I took the incident file into my office and grasping at straws I started searching for anything I might have overlooked in the months immediately prior to the crime.

My first hit was a report dated July third at 9:02 p.m. which caught my eye because of the heading “Explosion.” The complainant lived in one of the big bucks homes by the ocean, and the location was given as the end of the Millionaires Row extension. Following up they found the site of a small explosion some two hundred yards to the east, probably a kid anticipating the national holiday the following day.

Another item of interest came from the golf pro, Dave Williams, who on August twenty-eighth had arrived at 6:45 a.m. to find the front door to the pro shop unlocked. After determining the cash in the safe was intact he had taken a quick inventory of the high-value items and discovered nothing missing. Not sure of its significance, nevertheless I made a photocopy of the report for my case file.

No new information surfaced from the rest of the reports, and as I was finishing Mona arrived with the morning mail. “Sorry to be late boss, damned Yankee tourists slowing down us hard working people trying to earn a living. But it does look like the rain’s stopping, finally! Now, for the bad news, here’s something that came in yesterday and needs your immediate attention,” she said, seating herself in the visitor chair, in no hurry to leave. Concern turned to curiosity as I directed my attention to what she handed me: a newspaper story from the preceding day’s Jacksonville paper.

> Special, September 17. It was announced because of the freak accident to tour pro Cliff Simpson yesterday an invitation had been issued to former University of Florida golfer and legendary New Zealand pro Glenn “Gator” Wilson to play in the September 25 Sawgrass Shootout invitational pro-am tournament. Mr. Wilson, who plays infrequently in the United States and is recovering from shoulder surgery last April, accepted saying he considers the United States his second home and he would welcome the opportunity to play despite the currently high level of international instability. The trip to Jacksonville will be the first for the golf pro’s new corporate luxury jet and it is expected he will be in the pilot’s seat for a major portion of the journey. To the millionaire sportsman’s many local fans who will again have a chance to see him in action, we say—”Go Gator!”

Confused, I asked Mona , “This is a newspaper story about Gator Wilson playing at Sawgrass. Who sent it? And why? Do you have any idea?” She replied immediately, “Sure. It came from Mr. Jones and there was a note with it...Oh! Oh! Sorry about that, the routing slip must have fallen off.” I waited anxiously until she returned

from her office, my confusion turning into concern as I read the note she handed me.

Charley. This guy is that awful Trostle woman's uncle. Three years ago he and I played golf together and really hit it off. I called him and he said he would fly in on the 23rd so we could play again the following day. Unfortunately, the Trostles have already agreed to pick him up at Jacksonville as Altima International can't handle his corporate jet. Last time they turned his visit into a giant media circus. It won't happen again. May need your help. Em".

In the short time I had been on the job, I had learned when it was "Charley" and "Em," Charley ended up doing most of the work. I asked Mona if this was going to cause problems for me, and exactly who were the Trostles? Concern changed to near panic with her reply.

"Tara Trostle is a resident flake whose husband works for Mr. Jones, running his construction crews. She's what they call 'easy,' if you get what I mean, real easy, like just ask. Currently it's rumored she's having an affair with the bread man who services the Island Supermarket, poorly I might add. But, the big-time golfer really is her uncle and she's always running her mouth about how much money he's going to leave her when he dies. Anyhow, the last time he came for a visit it was also before some big tournament. He wanted to practice and Mr. Jones volunteered to play with him. Tara found out and wrote a press release describing it as an exhibition match to which the public was invited. Well, Mr. Jones hit the ceiling because he didn't want a whole bunch of outsiders tearing up the course. He tried to solve the problem by announcing it was a charity event and spectators had to pay to attend. But that didn't work. To make a long story short, there were a lot of mad people who were turned away at the gate and the island residents just showed up because there wasn't really any way to keep them out. Mr. Jones was furious about all the bad publicity and in the end he had to make a donation to the charity out of his own pocket. He can be really mean if you cross him. I wouldn't want to be in Tara's shoes if anything further happens this time."

Realizing that a new local crisis was rearing its ugly head less than a week away, I decided a call to my boss was in order. Surprisingly he picked up, himself, on the second ring, correctly inferring I was calling about the “Gator” problem and asking me what I was doing about it.

“Boss. I’ve been working on the security aspects of Mr. Wilson’s visit, when he plays a practice round with you on Monday the twenty-fourth, is that correct?” I asked in my most businesslike manner, desperately stalling for time. Luckily Mr. Jones chose not to emulate his laconic secretary with a one-word reply, supplying badly needed details about the pending visit.

“Sorry, Charley. Should have put you in the loop. Gator’s going to get here Sunday night and stay with the Trostles. Then we’re going to play at three the next day and I may need you to drive him back to Jacksonville that night. That OK with you?”

“Fine. I was wondering how we would handle that, ties together another loose end in my plan. About the only other thing I need is your advice on what we should do about crowd control, which I understand was an issue last time “

“Absolutely. What do you have in mind?”

Mind working feverishly I continued. “My plan is really quite simple, and modeled after tried and true procedures on the PGA golf tour,” I started, figuring if it was PGA-sanctioned my boss wouldn’t question it. “Right now I am developing a list of volunteers from the senior golf association who will serve as marshals on the various holes just like the pro tour. We won’t need many as we only have to man a couple of holes at a time, and I’m going to favor those with military experience, like Rangers or the Marines,” I added for my boss’s amusement. “Plus I’m going to have the guys from maintenance string ropes down the sides of the fairways to keep the public off the course. Finally, I thought we would set up a press tent near the clubhouse, where the media could conduct interviews and maybe lift a cold one courtesy of the

corporation. And, outside we would hand out the ‘Paradise Experience’ brochure, that is, if you aren’t adverse to getting a little free publicity.”

“Perfect!” replied my boss, sounding positively ecstatic. “I can see this one is in good hands—before you sign off—anything new to report on the murder?”

“I’m cooperating with several law enforcement jurisdictions, and the moment there is something specific to report you’ll be the first one to know,” I concluded in my most reassuring manner, failing to mention that my other boss, Sheriff Perkins, had arranged for me to meet with the FBI that very afternoon. Signing off my boss ended the call with a few reassuring words about how pleased he was with the resident security operation.

CHAPTER 15—CROSS OVER THE BRIDGE

Halfway between sleeping and waking I woke to my cell phone's electronic beeping. The excited Coastal guard reported there had been an accident on the golf course involving one of the groundskeepers and he had called the EMTs. Soon I was knotting my tie and thankful the temperature and humidity had yet to reach forecasted levels I headed out the door. Pulling off onto the shoulder of the coastal highway I parked the cruiser and ploughed my way through the sand to the seventh hole, after which golfers have to cross a wobbly wooden bridge over a marshy area to reach the next tee. A whole section of the bridge had collapsed, dumping a bright red utility cart straight down into the muck, its trailer buried under a heap of railroad ties. The third shift officer was standing over a tall lean youth who sat head in hands on a small abandoned oyster bed, his turquoise and coral jump suit identifying him as one of the course's groundskeepers.

The guard told me what had happened. "The bridge collapsed just as Bobby here was headed over the bridge to work on number eight, dragging a load of railroad ties. As far as I can tell all he suffered was a bump on the head. It's lucky his buddy trailing behind him was able to pull him out of the water. Otherwise, he would probably have drowned."

Although the youth insisted he was okay, I asked him to remain quiet while I used my cell phone to call Dr. Joseph Juliante, a semi-retired physician whose medical practice ranked a distant second to time spent on the practice tee. I asked him to meet me at the clubhouse to examine the accident victim. Leaving the guard to secure the scene and divert any players who might later arrive, I assisted the shaken groundskeeper up onto the utility cart I appropriated from his friend. While heading for the clubhouse, smelling distinctly of stale beer, in a shaky voice he provided a reasonably coherent description of what had happened.

"This morning I was sent back to finish the work on the bulkhead. Yesterday I went over the bridge four times. No problem! But, today, it happened—just like that! Last night I was, you know, partying pretty late but I swear I was paying attention. I was going slow, you know, so the railroad ties wouldn't shift and all of a sudden the bridge went down. I guess I was out cold, because next thing Mike was dragging me out of the water, you know, I coulda drowned. Maybe the trailer was too heavy. Beats me!" he concluded, a puzzled expression on his face.

Recalling the accident scene, I asked, "Bobby, I want you to think carefully. Did the bridge collapse when you drove the utility cart onto that section? Or, did the bridge collapse under the trailer?"

His brows pressed together he answered shortly, "I guess that's what's been bugging me. Maybe I told you wrong. I'm pretty shook up. The bridge went straight down, you know, it fell sorta slowly with me headed for the water with the trailer kinda following. Seems maybe I tried to, you know, jump off, and that's when my head musta hit the ground. Man, I feel bad!" he exclaimed. "Worse than after a night partying." Hand cupped over his mouth while I brought the cart to a skidding halt, he tried to make it to the bushes before he vomited.

I was relieved when Dr. Juliante arrived clutching a worn medical bag. He guided the youth over to the players' bench and proceeded to examine him, starting by aiming the beam of a small penlight

into his eyes. Finally, he announced professionally, "As best I can tell, this young man is suffering from a slight concussion. If you like I'll stay with him until the EMTs arrive. I'll be happy to give up my tee time," he concluded proudly. Glad that the good doctor had his priorities in order, I called the physical plant to have them seal off the bridge with sawhorses. My next stop was the clubhouse where I briefed Dave Williams on the accident and asked him to close the course. Unable to tell him whether we had an accident or another crime on our hands, I told him I would get back to him later.

Uncertain how to proceed, back at the office I tried unsuccessfully to reach Billie Greene, being told all the regulars were at a meeting. The deputy answering the phone asked me if I wanted to make a report of a crime against a person or a crime against property.

"I'm not sure, but since there's an open murder investigation I felt you guys would be interested. All I know is we've got a suspicious accident over here, a bridge that collapsed when a groundskeeper drove a utility cart over it. I'm investigating, just wanted you guys to know."

"OK," he replied. "Let's report it as a crime against property. Now. What happened?"

Consulting my notebook, I replied momentarily, "Young guy. Name of Bobby Hayes—"

"Bobby Hayes!" the receiver blared. "He's kin to my wife. Hey! That kid wasn't any good when times were good. Heard they hired him over there. Beats me how he handles a day job when he's out partyin' all night. Was he sober when he did it?"

"Well, I did smell beer on his breath, but he seemed sober to me," I recalled.

"Shoot! That kid's drunk so much I'm not sure anyone's ever seen him sober. Lucky his uncle has a body shop because he's wrecked

more cars than you can count. You can close this case as quick as you opened it, because when Bobby's involved in an accident you can be damn sure he caused it! First time he's wrecked a utility cart —usually it's Pontiac GTOs!" he bellowed. Hearing laughter in the background I quickly gave him the information and thanked him for taking the report. I hung up deciding I had spent enough time amusing the folks at the sheriff's department.

Putting away my phone I checked my in-basket, contemplating the now negligible pile of paper. Here I was, all by myself marooned on a sandbar with five hundred people and no one on the mainland seemed to give a damn. Lower than a worm's belly I said I was going out on patrol. After a cursory pass through the Lower Village I headed for my only safe haven—Number Ten.

"Hon," I asked "what should I do?" not really expecting an answer. "Here I sit, possibly with an attempted murder on my hands, and all anyone seems to care about is when they can play golf again. Everyone at the sheriff's office is at a meeting, and because I might mess up a crime scene I can't do anything on my own."

Sensing my frustration Mel quickly replied, "It's been worrying me, too. I hate to see you this way. Remember how uptight the detectives were back in the City if they were spinning their wheels in a high profile investigation—blaming lack of funds, old equipment, their partner, even the Commissioner, everything but themselves. Now the shoe fits, and you're wearing it. So I'll give you the same advice I used to give them. Get off your butt and do something, even though it might be wrong. Sitting around the house feeling sorry for yourself isn't going to solve the problem!" she stated forcefully.

I agreed. Crossing my fingers I again dialed the sheriff's department. I asked if anyone in the crime scene unit was on duty. This put me in touch with a Sgt. Matsuo who after I identified myself told me in clipped tones he was a staff criminologist and that he needed to clear with someone in authority before he could investigate a possible crime scene. Returning to the line shortly, he

said he was making up some time, but if he could wrap up what he was working on in a couple of hours he'd be happy to undertake what he identified as an "informal" investigation. Informal or not, I told him I needed all the help I could get.

When "Matty" Matsuo arrived he turned out to be a youthful-appearing Asian-American, angular face with close cropped black hair clinging to his skull, nearly six feet tall, thin and wiry with an engaging smile. A California native, he had been employed by the Los Angeles Police Department before moving to Florida two years previously. As we walked toward my police vehicle he chuckled. "Chief, your cruiser makes me feel right at home. Except the eagle is a little too fierce, even for L.A. You must be one tough cop!" he exclaimed laughing. Assuring him I was not, I helped him load into the trunk a battered black suitcase, electronic equipment, a camera, a hand-held spotlight and, wisely, dark green rubberized fisherman's waders. We drove to the clubhouse where we appropriated a golf cart for the bumpy ride to the accident site.

When we reached the cart bridge we were bombarded by the full impact of the fetid, dense warm odor from the swamp. Matty worked his way into the waders and pulled on a pair of rubber gloves. Sliding down the slope he thoughtfully studied the collapsed bridge section, leaning backwards to view it from the side. Aided by a magnifying glass and a spotlight he carefully examined the underside of the bridge, followed by a scrutiny of the two bridge supports canted out at a crazy angle under the weight of the collapsed planking. Next he distastefully plunged his right arm into the murky water and the muck, and feeling around extracted several items that he sealed in small plastic evidence bags, writing on them with a grease pencil. He concluded his investigation with a detailed examination of the twisted wreckage of the utility cart and the trailer. Using an impressively complex camera with a long lens he took numerous photographs of the scene, electronic flash penetrating the gloom under the bridge, recording each in a small notebook.

Back at the clubhouse, we ordered coffee and donuts in the Horizon Grill, and after studying his notes, he started. "Let me state in my professional opinion the accident at the bridge was no accident. I found a lot to support this conclusion. While the bridge supports were weakened by years of exposure to the brackish water, there were clear signs someone had sawn some of them in half. This means the damage was probably done last night when the tide would have be located low around three in the morning," he speculated, his gaze shifting out to the ocean reflecting the direction of his thoughts. "It's quite clear a hand saw was used, however the wood is weathered to the point I don't think we'll be able to match the cuts with any specific make or type of saw. Even more indicative of sabotage was someone removing enough nails at critical points to seriously compromise the integrity of the bridge, especially the heavy spikes driven into the metal plates holding together the treated dimensional lumber providing the framework for the planks. I saved some of them as conclusive evidence of criminal intent as it's clear they were recently pried up with a sharp object. I also found one of the metal plates and it supports the same conclusion. Since we're just into the new moon this would hardly have been to the perpetrator's advantage, so it's likely that a light was used at the scene. I just didn't find any evidence of it. Keep this in mind in your investigation …."

"Matty. I really owe you one." I said gratefully, wolfing down a bite of my jelly donut. "Let me ask a question. In your opinion, was it the weight of the cart itself or the railroad ties in the trailer that caused the bridge to collapse?"

"Good question. My best guess is the bridge had been so weakened that the utility cart, or a golf cart for that matter, would have been enough to cause it to collapse. That bridge was on its way down before the weight of the railroad ties was of any consequence."

"In other words," I conjectured excitedly, "the bridge was an accident waiting to happen, a booby trap, and it didn't matter who crossed it first—they would have gone down, too."

"Exactly. You've got somebody running loose who doesn't seem to have much regard for human life, a terrorist if you will!"

"Speaking of terrorism, you were one of the technicians investigating the golf club incident. I wonder if there's anything more you could tell me about that," I asked offhandedly. Almost instantly his expression changed, reflecting concern, even alarm, as he replied stiffly, "I'm sorry, that's something I'm not free to talk about."

Taken aback by his response I handed the check to the hovering server and said I owed Matty one. As I watched his vintage Karman Ghia exit the busy parking lot I wondered how I could compete in this deadly cat and mouse game when people wouldn't give me all the facts.

CHAPTER 16—GOING WITH THE FLOW

Just after two I learned I wasn't the only one concerned about what was happening on the island. I answered the call myself during Mona's coffee break. After a brief pause during which someone recovered a dropped receiver accompanied by an audible "Dammit!" a forceful high-pitched voice announced, "Darby Reynolds here. Chief Adams please." Identifying myself, she cut me short with "I'm on my way to do a story on the mad bomber of Paradise Cay and I need some background. First...." The forceful voice I recognized as a media express with a full head of steam, and I hastened to interrupt. "Pardon me. Who is this again? Do I know you? Please speak slowly as we have a bad connection," I lied, a good line I'd used before.

"Dar-by-Reyn-olds," she said, drawing it out, syllable by syllable, proceeding slowly as if talking to a small child. "I covered the story when the undertaker hooked up with the exploding golf club, but now I hear that the mad bomber has struck again, another tragic accident that appears to be the work of the maniac loose on your island."

"Ms. Reynolds," I came back calmly, "where on earth did you get your facts? I can—" The receiver resonated as she excitedly cut me off. "I do *not* reveal my sources to anyone! So, enough of that crap! Are you going to take the easy way out and give me the story, or do you want to play hardball and have me get it on my own? It's your call!"

Drawing on my past experience in handling overly aggressive electronic journalists, I responded, "I've got no problem with whatever you do. But, do you really want to waste your time over a simple accident involving a golf course worker who was driving a utility cart in which there was a bunch of railroad ties? I investigated this one personally and no one was injured, but you know how careless hourly-wage people can be when working on golf courses. If you want I'll make the employee available and maybe he can mumble a few words into the camera. And, if you don't mind the snakes and mosquitos you can get some well swamp

footage. That should really knock them dead on the five o' clock news ."

"Okay. I get the picture. Are you telling me at the present time there's no formal investigation underway involving the sheriff and the FBI?" she asked directly.

"Don't ask me. I'm just a dumb rentacop," I said dejectedly. " But, I was on the scene right after the incident occurred. Not only haven't I written this one up, but I have no plans to waste any more time on it."

After a brief pause, she asked, "If anything comes of this, can I count on you to keep me posted?"

"Sure. Provided they let me and I'm not too busy."

I think I heard the noise of her engine diminishing in the background, telling me she was probably preparing to do a one-eighty in search of better fodder for her nightly report. The reporter hung up abruptly, just in time for me to pick up a call on the other line.

"This is Billie," the caller announced, decidedly cooler than our last meeting. "Charley, I was a little disappointed you went over my head yesterday. I thought that we were working together on this thing, and . . ."

In my best damage control mode I interrupted her, leaping into the breach. "You were the first one I called but they said you were at a meeting or something and with the tide coming in I wanted someone to check the crime scene before everything was washed out to sea," I stated dramatically. "After filing a report they connected me to forensics and I waited for Matty to clear it with the sheriff himself," I added, time line confused but details technically correct, invoking higher authority, further prepared to disavow any knowledge of who "they" might be if subject to direct questioning, all tried and true ploys from the political arena.

“No sweat” she replied lowering my anxiety quotient considerably. “I’ve read Matty’s report and, I agree, this thing’s probably not over yet. I’m on my way and should be there in twenty minutes. That okay with you?”

“You ask if it’s okay? Turn on the light and floor it! That’s how badly I need help,” I exulted, happy to be back in the law enforcement loop one more.

A few minutes later Billie greeted me like a long lost friend, eagerly accepting my offer of an office soda, settling down in the visitor’s chair, trying to get comfortable. As usual, I was impressed by the pleasant combination of femininity and professionalism so much a part of her personality. She was again dressed in a dazzling white uniform shirt, a pleasant contrast to her tailored royal blue slacks. After a couple of minutes small talk, almost as if we were reluctant to discuss what was on our minds, she started, “Matty tells me the crime technicians can’t help much on this one, but he thinks we should look seriously for a motive. Maybe there’s a pattern and we just aren’t seeing it.”

“My thoughts exactly,” I agreed. “But what makes things doubly difficult is we not only have no motive, but it also seems the victims are chosen at random.”

“True. But to get started let’s forget about the victims for the moment and assume the perpetrator is someone who has a grudge against the company which owns and manages the island, somebody with an unresolved grievance or who feels they have been treated less than fairly. This assumes the corporation or the golf course is the real object of the attacks, for whatever the reason. Maybe you can do some research into the past, looking for motives and possible victims, maybe a disgruntled employee, past or present. I haven’t a clue where to start--maybe it’s a dumb idea. I’m assuming you’ve got personnel records and other stuff in your computer system. Am I making any sense?” she said, looking at me expectantly.

While pondering my answer to her question I found myself looking up at the ceiling, an idea dimly taking shape. “It just so happens right up there are a bunch of file cabinets which might tell the history of this place.” Noting her puzzled expression, I explained, “There’s a second floor--the stairs are in Mona’s office.”

Consulting her watch she extricated herself from the chair, preparing to leave. She told me that she would appreciate it if I used Sheriff’s deputies only, and said that they would soon be installing install video cameras at the front gate to record license numbers and photograph people passing through. I told her I had no objection, happy that I could keep both her and Agent Drummond happy in the process. I was also pleased to know that I was squarely in the investigation loop and I told her I would be in touch as soon as I had anything to report. With the waters muddied by the bridge non-accident and with the investigation bogged down, I wasn’t sure how long that would be, producing an emotional response from Billie.

“Charley, we can’t just sit on our hands. We’re just inviting another attack unless we come up with a plan anticipating all the bad things that might happen while we wait for the other shoe to drop. For starters, let’s follow your lead in putting a little more heat on the crime technicians , especially when it comes to the explosive. But, how about we look seriously for a motive. Maybe there’s a pattern and we just aren’t seeing it,” she suggested thoughtfully.

“My thoughts exactly,” I agreed. “But, what makes things doubly difficult is we are still in the dark when it comes to the motive for the attacks, and it seems the victims are chosen at random.”

“True. But, given the serious intent to kill or maim, the perpetrator is either a terrorist striking out blindly, or some nut case with a deep-seated grievance or who stands to benefit big-time from the risk he’s taking. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes,” I replied hesitantly. “In the short time I’ve been here I really don’t know what’s happening out on the street. In many ways, the island is a closed community. People don’t seem to have any trouble talking to me, but I have yet to develop any sources. I suspect you haven’t either. You don’t live on the island, which is relatively crime-free, and I doubt you’re called over here very often. Both of us really don’t know what we don’t know.”

“Charley, very profound! You don’t appreciate the amount of time we’ve already spent on this case. I’m not being critical. It’s our fault for not keeping you in the loop.” Pausing momentarily to shuffle through her notebook, she continued, “It’s like shooting in the dark hoping to hit something, but we started with anyone who might be even remotely connected with what’s happened either as a perpetrator, or victim, or indirectly in the event the corporation, even the golf course is the real object of the attacks, for whatever the reason. For starters we checked out the boss man, Emlyn Jones, his wife Sylvia, Dave Williams, Red Jones, Dr. Orwell, Dr. Myers, your former counterpart Ernie Espinosa, Marjorie Nettles and a couple of her more militant animal rights people, plus Cecelia Wentworth and your administrative assistant, Mona. And, don’t forget the complete workup we did on the dead guy from Pennsylvania, which led us absolutely nowhere.

“And what did you come up with?”

“About what you’d expect. Arrests: the Nettles woman: several times for trespassing, disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and one way back, interestingly for solicitation, charges later dropped. Dave Williams has an old DUI on his record, while the FBI requested anything we might have on Online Onslow and Dr. Myers. From the date I guess this might be the result of your meeting with Agent Drummond. I haven’t asked you about that because he probably swore you to secrecy.” Closing her notebook, she asked directly, “Got any names you’d like to add to the list?”

“Can’t think of any,” I replied hesitantly. “But, I’ll keep you posted. You’ve got a better handle on the situation than I have.

What do you suggest we do now?”

“For me, I’m going to keep after the crime lab to see if forensics can be of any further help. And, I’m going to stay by the phone. Remember, we’re partners but at least for the time being we each have our own assignments. However, we are cooperating in the really big one from Agent Drummond, that is controlling access to the island. Any day now they should be installing the computer system and cameras to keep track of everyone who passes through the main gate, both directions. There will also be video surveillance equipment at the gatehouse. You are going to videotape every vehicle that goes through, a little shaky from a privacy standpoint but it’s private property and you’re an employee of the owners. A small notice mentioning video cameras being used in surveillance might be in order. If need be, then the tapes can be matched up with your computer scan on dates, times, license numbers and information about the vehicles’ occupants. We will also have one of our boats patrolling the shoreline, especially after dark. Who knows? If things heat up we may get to use the helicopter or the airplane. On top of this, starting tonight we’ll have off-duty officers replace the Coastal guys altogether, relying on you and Mona and one of our guys to keep a sharp eye out in the daytime, primarily by increasing patrols and getting out on the street. If you get bored maybe you can do some research into the past, looking for motives and possible victims, maybe a disgruntled employee, past or present. I haven’t a clue where to start. Maybe it’s a dumb idea but you have personnel records and other stuff in your computer system. Am I making any sense so far?” she said, looking at me expectantly.

“Totally. You are the best partner I’ve ever had, and now it’s my turn to get busy and give you something in return,” I said, as she extricated herself from the chair, preparing to leave.

“Charley, I know you will. But I’ve got to get going: a department meeting to discuss this mess. Let’s keep our guys busy. Go through records.; talk to people. Start thinking about motive and

opportunity and we'll get the equipment installed. And, keep the heat on Coastal. Can you think of anything else?"

"Yes," I answered, liking the "our" guys part. "I'd better call my boss and let him know what we have in mind."

"Good idea," she agreed. "But you won't get any static from him, he just goes with the flow."

Recalling all I had agreed to in the past few days, I thought: the situation was rapidly getting out of hand and Mr. Jones wasn't the only one going with the flow.

CHAPTER 17—CLIMBING UP STAIRS

I asked Mona how to access personnel records. She told me she could obtain current information , like home addresses and position titles, by using her password. In addition, there were some personnel records stored upstairs, although she didn't think they

were at all recent. Grabbing a flashlight, I climbed the narrow dimly-lit stairs. Pushing the light switch at the top, nothing happened. Greeted by a wall of warm, dead air, my flashlight revealed a large open space with file cabinets scattered around the walls, a heavy coat of dust everywhere. Noting what appeared to be two sets of footprints leading away from the stairs into semi-darkness, I went back downstairs, again seeking Mona's help.

Taking me to the small storage room to the rear of my office she found me a powerful clip-on flood lamp, and with the day man out on patrol she left me alone while she took care of traffic at the gate. Working my way through the jumbled contents of the room, I assembled those that might be the most useful. Included were a digital camera, a piece of chalk, a pair of scissors and a pad of tracing paper. To this I added the day's newspaper from the outer office and I went back upstairs.

Reaching the top of the stairs my attention was again drawn to the two sets of footprints in the dust. Using the light to better study them, I found the larger ones in places partly obliterated some of the smaller, leading me to believe the person with the smaller feet had visited the site first. Kneeling on the newspaper I carefully outlined in chalk the best impressions I could find for each set, using the tracing paper to make a permanent record. Finally, I chalked in arrows showing the direction of travel, and I managed to obtain reasonably clear photographs of the scene that I previewed at the highest magnification level on the screen of the digital camera.

What interested me the most was where the footprints ended, at a filing cabinet labeled: Mr. Jones, Personal. The yellow manila folders appeared to be in chronological order, with the most recent one dated: October 1 - December 31, 1998. This suggested these were archived files, and the date was probably when computers took over. The way some of the folders were stuffed into the drawer made it clear the intruder had been most interested in the oldest ones.

From the very back I extracted a thick, undated folder labeled "Project X," crammed full with planning, financing and construction documents for the then unnamed island community. There were press releases and other pre-opening publicity, including camera-ready copy for a promotional brochure featuring Emlyn Jones Senior and his family. Removing the paper clip from the attached sheaf of photographs, I followed the illustrious man's life story. It started with a faded family portrait taken when he was a small child, surrounded by proud parents and maybe aunts and uncles. After a high school graduation photo I was treated again to the sight of Emlyn, Senior as a young man, his right arm encircling a slight, pale faced wide-eyed woman in a flowered dress holding a blanket-wrapped infant. I concluded this was their first-born, Emlyn Second. On top of this was another family portrait, more recent in origin. I readily identified Emlyn Senior and wife, Abigail, and finally decided the college-age youth wearing the dark brown football jersey with contrasting brown and white stripes on the sleeves was my boss. The infant he was cradling had to be his brother, Red. Scanning the rest of the photos nothing more caught my attention until the last one—a flower-covered casket consigning Mr. Jones the elder to his final resting place.

Replacing the publicity materials, I was contemplating the jumbled pile of construction documents and financial statements when I noticed a piece of carbon tissue sticking out, suggesting it had been hastily replaced. It proved to be two pages stapled together, the top one headed: Last Will And Testament Of Emlyn Aubrey Jones II. Deciding the urgency of the investigation outweighed ethical considerations I read the short, single-paragraph document.

"I, Emlyn Aubrey Jones II, being sound in mind and body do hereby make this my last will and testament. Rather than going into unnecessary detail, it is my intention that my estate be distributed as if I had died intestate under the provisions of Florida State Law."

At the bottom of the document were my boss's scrawled signature, plus those of two witnesses, Carmine Truegood and Hayward Spenser, and the date: 11/18/83.

For the life of me I couldn't understand why a man would make a will only to specify his estate be handled as if he had died without one. I decided this might be a problem for Mona with her criminal justice degree.

The second document was also a will, that of Emlyn Jones Senior, dated in 1981, apparently superseding an earlier one. He had left his entire estate to his eldest son as executor, with the provision if he predeceased him the proceeds would go into a charitable trust, to be administered as specified in Attachment A. Since the attachment was missing, I had no idea of its provisions. The rest of my search took till late afternoon, and I turned up two more items of potential interest. The first I found in a series of real estate transactions for the year 1995: a copy of the deed transferring title to land and dwelling at 17 Sandpiper Lane from the Paradise Cay Development Company to Patricia A. Holifield. From the address it was a golf course condo. The deed was signed by Emlyn Jones II and attested to by his secretary, as a notary public. The transaction was not unusual in itself, as many residents owned their property free and clear. But, I wondered: how did Trish Holifield come up with that kind of money?

My other discovery was in the last folder, going almost unnoticed as my tired eyes waded through a sheaf of expense vouchers. The name and address on the front suggested a law firm, but as I flipped the page the words "Private Investigations" grabbed my attention. The billing was from an Orlando firm for the month of August 1998 for "Surveillance: Williams" in the amount of $1,385.00. While the name was common, Dave Williams was the only one that came to mind. But, I couldn't think of any good reason why Mr. Jones would spend this kind of money to snoop on his underachieving golf pro. Eager as I was to finish, I carefully checked invoices for the three months preceding and following but I didn't come up with a hit. If it was important, perhaps Billie could help as many private eyes were ex-cops or otherwise benefited from close ties with law enforcement agencies.

When I finished the night man had already arrived. Mona was still at her desk. Sensing her curiosity, and remembering my promise to keep her informed, I gestured her into my private office, closing the door.

“Mona, I need your help badly,” I said. “It’s a delicate matter involving our boss and I want you to think very carefully before you make a decision. We could both lose our jobs if word of this gets out but that’s a risk I’m willing to take. It’s your call. I can probably get someone else to help me if you don’t want to take the assignment, and there will be no hard feelings.”

It didn’t take her long to answer. “I appreciate your respect for my abilities and your treating me as a law enforcement professional. I understand perfectly what you’re saying and I’m flattered by your faith in me. Of course, I’ll accept the assignment. Whatever it is!” she concluded emotionally.

Handing her Jones II’s will I asked her to make two copies. Her eyes widened as she saw the heading, but wordlessly she headed for the copy machine. “Is it alright to read this?” she inquired upon returning.

“Of course.”

I waited while she read, a quizzical expression on her face. When she looked up I said, “Mona, your background is far better than mine when it comes to legal matters. But, I’m frankly puzzled by this document. On the surface, it doesn’t make any sense.”

“Me, neither,” she confessed. “But, I can call up the Florida statutes on my computer at home, and I’ll take a stab at it.”

“Fine. Please do that. And, while you’re at it, how about looking into what effect divorce might have on inheritance. Is that a problem?”

“Not at all. If I’m lucky I’ll have a report for you tomorrow morning. Is that too late?” she asked, smiling impishly.

I think she sensed the sincerity of my thanks and I noticed a decided bounce to her step as she left the office. Following her out into the twilight it occurred to me: help is doubly welcome when you need it the most.

CHAPTER 18—PANDORA’S BOX

The following morning Mona beat me to the office by a wide margin as I went directly to Mr. Jones staff meeting, the hot topic being the bridge incident. Mr. Jones was anxious to receive any feedback about how the handling of the incident was being received by island residents. Dave Williams offered the most bizarre explanation, one that came from a college professor who claimed the whole thing was a fraternity initiation prank .l couldn’t resist adding that I hoped he wasn’t teaching students majoring in construction management. in the construction management. Otherwise, the focus was on the measures being taken to monitor traffic entering the subdivision, which everyone agreed were long overdue. I really didn’t gain much from the protracted discussion. After the meeting I stayed behind to brief my boss on my visit with agent Drummond, for which he thanked me and on which he made

no comment, probably because he knew more about what was going on than I did. He also asked me if there was anything else not generally known which I would like to share with him.

Immediately, I realized I had made a mistake of epic proportions, forcing myself to deal with an ethical dilemma that I had hoped I would never face. As a condition of my employment with Paradise Development I had signed a confidentiality agreement that required me to protect sensitive information acquired on the job. But, I had also taken an oath with the Altima County Sheriff's Department to the same effect. The information I had gratuitously shared with my boss wasn't all that significant, but the request that it triggered from him put me in a very difficult position. Before I could ask for time to review my employment contracts a delaying tactic at best, I was rescued by a life-saving outside event: Ms. Watson's buzzer announcing a confidential call for which my boss had been waiting. On the way back to the office I thanked my guardian angel for watching over me, mentally assigning the whole issue to my "too hard" inbox. However, there was one thing that puzzled me. Previously, Em had taken the undertaker's death in stride, adopting a business as usual attitude toward the whole matter, and not concerned with the details. What I didn't understand was his sudden interest in receiving perhaps privileged information. Granted, I hadn't had that much contact with my boss, but from my limited perspective his present behavior seemed somewhat out of character. Given the pressure under which we had been the past few days, I shouldn't have really been surprised.

Arriving at my office I was eager for Mona to share her research into the strange provisions of Em's will but I had to shelve that plan as two technicians in white jumpsuits had showed up to spend the day installing the equipment and explaining the use of the color-coded decals that residents, employees and tradespersons with regular business would attach to their windshields. The decals had bar codes scanned to automatically raise the gate and input data to a computer. This provided a summary report of comings and goings, including time of entry plus photos of both the front and

back of entering and leaving vehicles, even though routinely we didn't really need that much information.

I also put Coastal Services on hold as they had effectively been replaced by a machine, which was not hard given the motley crew they provided ranging from twenty-one to eighty years in age in an incomprehensible scheduling pattern. I told them they had better turn it up a notch in the shopping malls because even after the present crisis was over we would probably be rebidding the contract. Coastal had met the eight hundred-pound gorilla, and it was me.

With the afternoon winding down when I returned to my office, Mona waited for me with a pile of documents that I hoped would make sense of whether the strange provisions of Mr. Jones will were relevant to the investigation at hand. Closing the door behind us, she started.

"Boss, remember I had only two legal courses in college, but they were my favorites. Always thought I might have made a good lawyer …." she mused, a faraway look in her eyes. "My courses focused on criminal law, very different than civil law. But I do know where to look and how to make sense out of some of the mumbo jumbo. I found the first priority in distributing the assets of an intestate estate is the surviving spouse, who gets everything if there are no surviving lineal descendants. By lineal descendants I mean children born to the deceased and the surviving spouse, adopted children of the deceased, and children born out of wedlock, under certain conditions. Are you following me so far? Is this what you wanted?" she asked, apprehensively looking up from her notes.

"Perfect," I replied. "But what if both parents are deceased? If there's no surviving spouse? What happens then?"

"If there is no surviving spouse, then the statutes specify an order of succession. This means you start with the highest ranked person or persons on the list to see who inherits. After the lineal

descendants, if there are none, the estate then goes to the deceased's mother and father, followed by brothers and sisters, grandfathers and grandmothers, and finally more distant relatives. It really gets complicated at this point. And, if there are absolutely no surviving kin then the estate escheats to the state. I guess this means Florida gets everything."

"OK. But, what if there's a divorce? What effect does that have on succession?"

"To answer that question let me read something directly from the Florida statutes: 'Any provisions of a will executed by a married person, which provision affects the spouse of that person, shall become void upon the divorce of that person or upon the dissolution or annulment of the marriage. After the dissolution, divorce, or annulment, any such will shall be administered and construed as if the former spouse had died at the time of the dissolution, divorce, or annulment of the marriage, unless the will or the dissolution or divorce judgment expressly provides otherwise.' The part about divorce being the same as death is kinda off the wall, sounds like it was written by a bitter ex-wife. But it gets the point across."

"Or maybe a vindictive ex-husband," I added. "I guess you've answered my questions," I observed disappointedly. "As you know this whole situation is driving me nuts. I feel helpless; like I should be doing something. But, what....?"

While Mona pondered my question, I decided to share with her my two other discoveries, starting with the property transfer to Trish Holifield. Visibly ill at ease and slightly red-faced, she haltingly started, "I don't know how to say this, Boss…but surely you must have heard there's a thing between Mr. Jones and that woman down at the conference center."

"I have heard rumors," I admitted. "But are you just passing on gossip? Have you any hard facts to go on?"

“A little of both,” she admitted. “Last year, I personally saw them having a late dinner at a fancy restaurant in Perdido. From the way they looked at one another I can’t believe it was anything work-related. And, Cecelia, who spends a lot of time in the Grill, says they often eat together in his private dining room.”

“But that doesn’t mean they’re having an affair,” I countered.

“True. But Trish is a lot younger than Sylvia, and better looking. She’s a prime candidate for the position of trophy wife the second,” she observed snidely.

“That may be true. But I’d still like to stick with the facts. I’ll follow up on Trish later. First, tell me what you know about Dave Williams.”

From her expression I gathered the golf pro was not high on the list of her favorite people. “Again, Boss, I’m going to the rumor mill. People say there might also be something between Sylvia and that slimy golf pro. She started taking golf lessons this spring and since then they’ve been seen together a lot, and I don’t mean just on the golf course. He hits on all the women, I know that first hand. But, what this guy really wants is an available rich widow, divorcee or whatever. He’s always in debt, can’t afford the fancy car he drives, and that bleached blond hair of his isn’t going to cover his bald spot much longer,” she concluded contemptuously.

“Do you think Mr. Jones is aware of what’s going on?” I asked.

“Who knows? If he does, maybe he doesn’t care if this gives him more time to spend with his conference center cookie. Maybe her personnel file will tell us something but to get the complete file I’ll need you to type in your private access code,” she said, pulling up a chair at my computer.

A few deft key strokes brought up data for Patricia A. Holifield. Together we studied the information on the screen. I was surprised to learn she was born in 1967, making me several years off in

estimating her age. She listed her place of birth as Edgewater. Mona told me it was a small community about a hundred miles up the coast, near Daytona Beach. Next of kin were listed as Althea and Norman Holifield, with her occupation “Registered Nurse” and his “Physician.” I decided this could help explain why Trish owned her condo free and clear. Surprisingly, she had lived near her home town until six years previously when she took her present job at Paradise Cay. Her prior employment history was spotty to say the least: waitress, hostess, retail store clerk. The most relevant employment was as a cart girl at a Daytona country club, hardly enough to justify her Paradise Cay starting salary of $39,000 a year. Pointing this out to Mona, I exclaimed, “Look at this. I didn’t realize we paid that well. Maybe she and I should change jobs,” I added facetiously.

From Mona’s stormy countenance it was apparent she failed to appreciate the humor in my remark. “Well, I’ll be ….” her voice trailed off. I didn’t know how much Mona earned, but I had heard the parent corporation’s wage scale for non-managerial employees was less than generous. “That’s a helluva lot for a good looking blonde to entertain visiting firemen,” she said bitterly.

“I know how you must feel,” I said sympathetically. “Perhaps there’s more here than meets the eye. Maybe I should do some checking into Trish’s background.”

Do that, Boss” she said. “And if you discover how she got that much money out of those tightwads, let me know. Even with my extra responsibilities, what I’m making after six years is peanuts compared to what she got when she was hired!”

Sensing she was upset, I promised her that I would look into getting her a raise for the fine work she was doing. When she showed no inclination to pursue the topic further I suggested she go home while I started looking into Ms. Holifield’s past.

After the door closed behind her I checked the internet for Edgewater deciding the local police might be a good place to start,

getting a telephone number. Wisely mentioning Sheriff Perkins's name to the answering officer, in a hearty voice he asked how he could help.

"I'm conducting a background check on one Patricia A. Holifield, who —"

"Don't have to tell me about Trish," he said laughingly. "The scenery around here took a real hit when she up and left several years back. Heard she went to the Daytona Beach, but no one's seen hide nor hair of her since. Along with a lot of other folks I've always wondered what happened to her."

"She's not wanted by the law for anything, is she?"

"Hell, No! She ain't never been in that kinda trouble. She was adopted by the Holifield's, a long time ago. They were real nice people but I heard tell her real momma had a wild streak. Trish sure raised a lotta hell, partying at the beach, that kinda stuff. After she left home she settled down a bit, still living it up but this time looking for the big hit with some rich dude—married, divorced or single—didn't seem to make much difference as long as they were free with the green stuff. Last job she had before she took off was up in Daytona. You know where she is now?"

"At this moment. No, I don't," I answered truthfully but deceptively. "Came across her name on an old employment application, and it gave her last address as 119A Palmetto Terrace. Sounds sort of fancy," I observed offhandedly.

"You'd better believe it. That's one of the big bucks condos out by the ocean near New Smyrna Beach. Must have been built in the late-seventies around the time she just up and left her parents and moved there right after high school. Man! She was a looker! We always figured some wealthy dude spent the bucks needed to put her away for his personal use. Not that she didn't play around on the side. But, at least she held a job and tried to keep a low profile. Like I said, one day she just up and left and that was it. If you

wanted you could go to the Clerk of Court's office in New Smyrna Beach and maybe find out where she moved from there. Thought of doing that myself, but never got around to it."

After thanking him for his information and promising to keep him informed if I turned up anything, I rang off, reaching for my road atlas. It was too late today, but tomorrow morning I was headed for the beach. Since it was Ax my absence at the office wouldn't be noted, and given the sensitive nature of the situation when it came to my boss it was clear this was a trip that I should take on my own time.

What I had learned from the files was moving things along. But, I was plagued by the nagging concern I might be opening Pandora's box.

CHAPTER 19—CRESTVIEW MANOR

Early next morning wearing my uniform and with Mel beside me in the patrol car I headed north on Interstate-95, the possibility of showers and heightened security precautions at the Kennedy Space Center causing us to abandon our initial plan to take the coastal highway. Taking the interstate north we eventually made or way over to the coast through Edgewater to shortly arrive at New Smyrna Beach, my chosen starting point in trying to unravel the tangled web of Trish Holifield's past. On busy Canal Street gaudy beachwear stores rubbed elbows with trendy boutiques and art galleries, with brick pavers dressing up the historic district in the search for tourist dollars. Initially I missed the government offices occupying former retail stores at the far end of the thoroughfare. Seeking directions at the county jail across from a small city park I was told most of the property records were at the county seat, but they might be able to help me in the assessor's office. I was directed to a shortcut through a narrow alley, first being required to go through the jail's metal detector and listen to the security

guard’s endless account of a bullet he had taken while thwarting a liquor store holdup.

After a short wait while a young couple worked out their anger over an increase in their property valuation, I identified myself to the bright-eyed, elderly clerk at the desk who said her computer was down but she might be able to get me some information by phone. After taking Trish’s name and former address she returned a few minutes later to tell me the property had been purchased in late 1985, in her own name. After living there eleven years title was transferred to a local resident whose name and address I recorded in my notebook. It meant nothing to me. Disappointed I had come this far for so little information I asked the clerk if she knew where Dr. and Mrs. Holifield lived.

She gave me a funny look before replying. “I hadn’t thought of them for years, until now. But I know a lot about them because my sister, Mildred, was their live-in maid. And the stories she used to tell! That was before they had to give up their house. Doc Holifield’s been dead for maybe five years, and Mrs. Holifield is blind, must be going on ninety. Lives in Crestview Manor, that’s a nursing home. I couldn’t help but notice you were interested in the property where their daughter used to live. She wasn’t their daughter really. She was adopted. And that’s what I think killed him and it sure didn’t help her any,” she said cryptically.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand. You said ‘killed.’ What did you mean by that?”

“I didn’t mean killed, like literally. You see, the Holifields were an older couple, never could have children of their own. He was a doctor in the military and she was a nurse. After he retired from the service they settled down here and opened an office, although they lived in Edgewater, right off the Waterway. A few years later when they were in their fifties they adopted Trish. She was always the apple of their eye, but they weren’t aware of half the things she did. My sister said she wasn’t surprised—the Holifields were just too old when they adopted her. Trish made no attempt to hide her lack

of respect for the Holifields because they weren't her real parents. By the time she was a teenager she was pretty much out of control: not coming home at night, threatening to run away, rumors that she even was into drugs. Shortly after she graduated from high school she told my sister she was going to get a swell place of her own. She didn't give the Holifields any warning either. My sister said one morning she just packed her things in the sports car they bought her for graduation and said she was leaving. Her adoptive parents were heartbroken and several months later they found out by accident she was still in town. But, they never saw her again. They were both in their seventies by then and when my sister couldn't take care of them anymore, that's when they gave up their house and moved to the nursing home, where he later died."

"If I wanted to get more information, would it make any sense for me to visit Mrs. Holifield?" I asked.

"It might. I've heard even though she's in bad health her mind is still sharp. It doesn't surprise me," she said reflectively. "I always thought she was the brains of the family."

After drawing me a map to the nursing home, I thanked the woman warmly. As I turned to close the door when leaving I noticed she hadn't changed position, her furrowed brows and faraway expression telling me she was still entertaining thoughts of the distant past.

I have a thing about nursing homes. Merely thinking about them makes me depressed. Crestview Manor was no exception. Despite carefully-tended flower beds, manicured lawns and cheerful decorator colors in the hallways, there's still the distinct odor generated by too many people living in not enough space, more than a few needing a good tub bath. Not only do nursing homes remind us of our own mortality, but they also depict the depressing consequences of getting old and being forced to rely on others. When I told Mel I shouldn't be long she took advantage of the break in the weather, the sun having unexpectedly made a dazzling appearance, casting shadows on the weather-worn wooden bench

near a massive live oak overhanging the small stream that meandered through the grounds. Picking up the book she brought along for just such occasions she started to read, hard-pressed to ignore the three plump Mallard ducks who waddled up in search of a handout.

A bored, gum-chewing attendant with bobbing curls, barely out of her teens, led me to Althea Holifield's room. Dull, sightless eyes aimed in my direction, the slight, wizened figure propped up in the bed sensed my presence, reaching out with a wrinkled, clawlike hand, whether to grasp mine or receive something I wasn't really sure. Taking her hand in mine, I was surprised by the strength of her grip and her clear, steady voice when she spoke.

"Please describe yourself to me. I always like to know what the person I'm talking to looks like." I was doing my best to comply with her request when she interrupted, "Mr. Adams, my curiosity has got the best of me. Why are you here?" she asked in the direct manner often adopted by the elderly.

Explaining I was making a routine inquiry, with trepidation I asked, "Mrs. Holifield, I would like to talk about Trish. If you don't want to, that's okay. I won't bother you anymore." I paused, trying to gauge her reaction. I was pleased to note her expression didn't change, so I waited patiently while she collected her thoughts, sightless eyes steady and unwavering.

"You're not bothering me, I appreciate the company. But, before I talk to you about Trish or anything else I think you owe me a more complete explanation. What's this 'routine inquiry' and how is she involved?"

Having anticipated just such a question, I explained I was verifying information on an employment application, hoping this would lead her to believe her adopted daughter was applying for a law enforcement job. Regretting the necessity for this deception I continued by telling her I had talked to someone at the assessor's

office who had sent me to see her, someone who had already filled me in with a lot of information about Trish and her family.

The shadow of a smile crossed her wrinkled features. “I’ll bet she did! You were gabbing with that busybody Mandy Hopkins. She should have retired years ago. The only reason she hangs on is so she can keep up on town gossip. And, she knows where the bodies are buried. Her sister, Mildred, she was an angel. If she was still alive I would be dying at home instead of this….” Words failing her, she continued “What exactly do you want to know about Trish?”

“Well, I’m most curious why she suddenly left home after she graduated from high school?” I asked, holding my breath to see how the old woman would react.

“Years ago, young man, I would have considered that an impertinent question. But time heals a lot of wounds. Mandy must have told you we adopted Trish late in life, probably a bad decision. It was a private adoption. Her mother was only nineteen, trailer trash who spent her life partying at the beach. Well, this was the permissive sixties and she got herself in what we called then ‘a family way.’ She went to a midwife who delivered the child. In those days you didn’t have all the social workers and family care agencies they have now. Illegitimacy was a stigma, not a fact of everyday life, so Mildred had to pick up the child. Anyhow, we had no trouble with the adoption and we brought that child up as if she was our own. But she always resented us….” she said wearily, the effort of speaking apparently more exhausting than I had realized.

“Please, Mrs. Holifield, there’s no rush. My main interest is why she left.”

“That’s what I’m leading up to. One day when she was eighteen someone called asking for her. It wasn’t one of her friends, no one I recognized but that wasn’t unusual. I said she was working at the Frosty Freeze and he thanked me. I asked her who he was when she came home late that night. She ignored me and went straight

upstairs and I didn't think any more about it. About a week later, he called again, around nine in the evening, only this time she was home. Taking the phone with the long cord so we couldn't hear what she was saying she talked to him for maybe fifteen minutes. The next morning she got up early, packed her things and left without so much as a goodbye or thank you. That's the last time I ever saw her. Later we learned she was living in a fancy place at the beach. There were a lot of rumors, but we didn't want to know. I'll be honest, she was hard to handle and we were too old and out of tune with the younger generation to make good parents. But she was such a beautiful child…." she concluded in a near whisper, settling back on her pillows.

"Mrs. Holifield, you've been very helpful and I know you're tired. I have only a couple more questions. Do you have any idea who Trish's real parents were? Or the man who called her on the phone?"

"I've forgotten her mother's name. It makes no difference. She died in a car accident not too long after she gave birth, that's why the child was up for adoption. The midwife died the same year as my husband. I don't know if Trish, or even her mother, knew who the father was. But, I have something here I've kept all these years which might help." Reaching into her bedside table she took out a timeworn purse and with surprisingly nimble fingers extracted a crumpled scrap of yellow paper which she handed to me. "I found this in her wastebasket a couple of days after she left. Maybe it will make more sense to you than it did to me, but I've always thought it might be important."

Holding it up to the light I read the indistinct, blurred childish handwriting: "Eddy Smith, Providence, Rhode Island." I was at a dead end. It had seemed like a good idea, but what I had learned contributed little or nothing to the ongoing investigation.

At least I had kept busy and done some sightseeing, and Mel had enjoyed the outing, but I had wasted a whole day. Or had I?

CHAPTER 20—DOWN IN THE SWAMP

Sunday morning Mel and I continued our long standing practice of sleeping in followed by a leisurely breakfast working our way through the massive newspapers. For as long as I can remember my wife has always pulled out the advertisements and inserts before arranging the sections neatly in piles. After scanning the sports news, I eagerly turned to the crossword puzzles, my favorites being those from the *New York Times,* that allow me to make use of some of the more obscure words I have learned over the years. Now, the routine remains the same but the papers are different, the *Times* and the *Daily News* replaced by the home-delivered *Perdido Press* and the voluminous *Miami Herald*, bought every Sunday at the Island News in Upper Village. Today my trip to the store took longer than usual, several people evidencing their concerns over the latest explosion as related to the national tragedy. I patiently explained that it had been a childish prank that was being handled by the boy's parents and it was of no interest to any law enforcement agency. As far as the events of nine-eleven were concerned I said I had nothing new to share with them and to the best of my knowledge what happened on our golf course was in no way connected with the national tragedy. Everyone seemed satisfied, relieved even, with the weak explanation, telling me I still enjoyed my largely undeserved status as a credible information source in times of trouble.

Driving home it occurred to me that in the not too distant past such inquiries might well have been met by one of my patented wisecracks, a byproduct of the less than professional attitude that hadn't exactly helped me in my previous law enforcement career. Times had changed, and so had I—maybe for the better, maybe for the worse. Settling down with the papers I turned to the crosswords and later watched the Dolphins win a close one over the Raiders. Mel mentioned in passing that there was a Sunday night sea food buffet at the clubhouse that she had heard was pretty good, but not

wanting to face the predictable barrage of questions about the golf course I opted to pass.

That night, with the impending golf event on tap for three p.m. the following afternoon, for me sleep was slow in coming and then only in fits and starts. Finally, shortly after five a.m., dressing by the night light I crept out of the bedroom. After a quick cup of black coffee and a dried out donut I closed the front door softly behind me, on my way to the office. The air was heavy and oppressive, totally calm, the familiar landscape steeped in shades of gray, and beyond the gray, inky blackness.

I found the night man, a sheriff's deputy with close cropped graying hair and rugged features, playing solitaire on the office computer. "How're you doing?" I asked with a friendly smile. "Real well," he replied. "Got seventy-six percent success in this session and right now I've got eleven wins in a row. It's been a quiet night. I guess a lot of the folks here are retired because it's like you roll the streets up after dark."

Looking over my first-ever activity report from the new computer system I noticed two familiar names logged out at 7:57 p.m. and 7:58 p.m., Cecelia Wentworth and Red Jones, in separate cars, yet to return. "Interesting," I observed. "I wonder where they were going?"

"I don't know, but I was a little worried when the guy rolled down the window to ask me how I was. I got a good whiff of booze on his breath. If I'd been on patrol I would have had him walk a line, but since I'm just a harmless old rentacop I let him go on his way," he noted whimsically. Reacting to my puzzled expression, he added. "I should have mentioned it, I'm pulling a double shift tonight because the other guy is sick. But it was worth it," he said excitedly, turning the page. "Take a look at this!"

I studied the computerized entry for 1:22 a.m. recording the arrival of the Trostles, and one Glenn Wilson of Aukland, New Zealand. "Couldn't believe it!" the deputy exclaimed. "Recognized him right

away from television—‘Gator’ Wilson, in the flesh! And I got his autograph…” he said proudly displaying a scrawled, illegible signature on office stationery. “The residents may not be night owls,” he continued, “but Gator’s group was feeling no pain, the woman especially, really out of it.”

Looking at my watch I noted the bagel place in the Upper Village was now open and offered to get us some fancy coffee and breakfast goodies, an idea he applauded. When I got back he asked me about my background, one of the few people I had met who needed to ask. We swapped lies till daylight when I left him in charge of the phones. I used what was left of the early morning quiet to catch up on paperwork before the staff meeting.

I first turned to my phone messages from the preceding day. I noticed one from Dr. Orwell marked “Please call when you can, very important.” Assuming 7:38 a.m. was not too early, I dialed his number. True to his nickname, Online Onslow answered the phone on the first ring. “Chief Adams. So glad you called. Because I am a Microsoft developer I am in the unique position of being able to upgrade a limited number of the island’s computers to Windows XP a month before it becomes available at retail. I had been a little leery of the new system after my disappointment with Millennium, but yesterday I went to a day-long seminar at the University of Florida explaining its features and now I’m a convert. I assume you have a personal computer and I wonder if you’d like me to come over today and install the new operating system. Besides—”

“Dr. Orwell,” I interrupted. “I’m so glad you thought of me. But my wife, Mel, is the one who uses the computer. She’s been teaching herself and she’s really into it. So let me give you her number. Tell her you talked to me and I think it sounds like a good idea. I’ve got to go now. But thanks again.” As I was hanging up, Mona, who had just arrived, asked me “What was that all about?”

“Some major breakthrough in the world of computing, I guess. But we need some breakthroughs, here and now. Take a seat. I need your help.” I had asked Mona to come in early because of the so-

called golf tournament. My worn-out appearance didn't escape her perceptive gaze, and she inquired, not totally in jest, "Boss. Do I detect the remains of a rough night?" I admitted that I felt less than one-hundred-percent, updating her on what I had learned about Ms. Holifield and asking her if she felt it was relevant to our present investigation.

She thought for some time before replying. "I'm not surprised. What you learned on your trip is totally consistent with what I told you. It tells me despite the charm she oozes she's really one tough broad. It also tells me she has a history of using susceptible males to get what she wants. I'll give her credit, a lot of people think she doesn't do much, but Cecelia says she works a lot on nights when there are dinners and receptions. Personally, she'd have to work almost every night for the kind of money she's getting," she said, face reddening. "Don't worry, I know that's confidential. But, what you learned strongly suggests the rumors about her and Mr. Jones are true," she added, pausing to assess my reaction.

Not exactly sure how to reply, I started, "Right now I'm trying to determine whether this has anything to do with what's going on around here. Do you see any connection between Mrs. Holifield and...I just remembered: it's time for the rescheduled staff meeting to make final plans for a day that I'll be glad when it's over."

Grabbing my uniform cap I was going out the door when I heard the unmistakable sound of a far off window-rattling explosion. My breath caught in my throat, faster than Mona could dial 911 I was cranking up the cruiser. Intuitively I looked toward the ocean and the back nine, the early morning skies already a brilliant blue. Memories of explosions resurfacing, I turned on Palmdale Avenue, for the first time ever using the siren and thoroughly alarming the scattered walkers and joggers making their way down the bike path. An extra blast on the siren attracted the attention of a solitary figure on a golf cart cutting diagonally across the fifteenth fairway in the direction of Saddlers Slough. Changing direction I soon realized it was Dave Williams and parking the cruiser I ran to meet

him. Joining him on the golf cart, we headed back toward the slough, dreading what we would find there.

Approaching the bridge leading to the fourteenth tee it was obvious a section near the center was missing, Abandoning the cart at the end of the bridge we made our way slowly out over the water, holding on to one of the side rails and more and more concerned as we approached the area of the blast. Dangerously close to the end, hardened as I was now by exposure to death and violence, I still wasn't prepared for the terrible sight of the hardly recognizable figure of what appeared to be a young woman face down in the murky, brackish water on the inland side of the bridge. Her limbs were splayed out at an impossible angle as if she had dropped from a height, the suspended strands of her long jet black hair moving slowly with the tide in a grim dance of death. Little remained of her golf cart proper, with its twisted chassis buried headfirst in the mud, a monument to violence marking her final resting place. However, the roof was remarkably intact, deposited by the force of the blast in a clump of bushes some fifteen feet away. Quietly contemplating the gruesome scene was a large white bird perched on one leg on the bank, head swiveling from side to side to follow our every movement.

Realizing there was nothing I could do to help the victim I left a visibly shaken Dave Williams on the bridge calling with his cell phone to close the course. I then headed back to the cruiser in the golf cart to get crime scene tape, at the same time leaving a message in my boss's voice mail. Returning to the bridge I saw Dave gesturing to a single player in a golf cart approaching from the thirteenth green at the opposite end of the bridge to turn back. Realizing it would be some time before help arrived I got the golf pro to help me secure the crime scene, stringing the bright yellow tape around nearby trees and bushes, sealing off the bridge. Then I sent him back to the clubhouse.

After the longest twenty-eight minutes I can remember the sound of distant, progressively louder sirens told me help was arriving. In

short order the scene was crawling with EMTs, sheriff's deputies, crime technicians, and a reporter from the county newspaper, ignored by everyone. I tried to direct their vehicles down the cart paths but looking at the ruts they left behind on the fairways and waste areas I shuddered to think of how the residents would react. Late arrivals included the county coroner and Sheriff Perkins himself. Listening intently, he received my report, nodding thoughtfully and finally joining his people at the crime scene.

Watching the beehive of activity and with no role in the investigation I decided to return to my office. As I entered the parking lot a vintage red T-Bird followed me in, a welcome figure emerging, Billie Greene. It was her day off and she had been on her way to Orlando when she got the call. Her blue jeans and Garfield T-shirt were in stark contrast to her normally upbeat professional attire, and as the clouds had now moved in I offered her the yellow slicker I kept in the car, which she gratefully accepted. Briefing her on the situation I told her I would be at the office, and asked her for a progress report on her way home. With wheels spinning she left, eager to get to the crime scene.

Coming down from a sustained period of hyperactivity, I watched her cart until it turned and disappeared from sight. Disaster had struck and even though I was officially a part of the investigating team, to do my job like Blanche in *Streetcar* I was still forced to rely on the generosity of strangers.

CHAPTER 21—BACK IN THE SADDLE

Entering the office, I found Mona holding down the fort by herself, answering the steadily ringing phones. She questioned me at length about what had happened out on the course. She also told me my boss wanted to be kept abreast of what was going on, and that a TV reporter would be arriving shortly. I called Mr. Jones but his line was busy, so I pitched in to help. Shortly thereafter I was being appropriately deferential to one of the first-row, oceanfront

residents, assuring her there was no immediate danger to her or her family, when Mona's frantic gesturing told me there was a higher priority call on my cell phone. It was Sgt. Greene, who surprised me by asking directly, "We're in a bind, need your help. The victim is a young Asian woman, a guest of one of the residents, but we don't know which one."

"That shouldn't be a problem," I replied reassuringly. "Guests have to be sponsored and if you contact the pro shop—"

"I know the procedure," she interrupted impatiently. "The victim has no identification and the golf pro told us his assistant took the tee time reservation over the phone last week, writing down the Chinese name as best she could. The victim's round was charged to account number 324, but the pro says it was in funny foreign writing and he might have got it wrong. That number belongs to a family who never heard of her. Think now: young slender Asian woman, maybe five foot two, long black hair, late-twenties…Ring a bell?"

"No. There are more than a few Asian families in the complex, but nothing connects. I can ask around. Maybe she was a visitor, and if she passed through the gate since the computer was installed we should have a record," I said, my eyes scanning the printout for likely names. I almost missed it—5:36 p.m., the preceding day: Wu Dan Shen, Taibei, ROC, guest of Dr. and Mrs. Philip Myers.

Relaying the information to Billie she had me spell the woman's name and asked me what ROC meant. I told her Republic of China. Curious about the family who had apparently been hosting our latest murder victim, Billie asked me if I knew anything about them. I told her Mel and Gloria Myers played in the same bridge group, and with her husband Philip, a retired physicist, they had moved to Paradise from Long Island some five years previously. The Myers lived in Palmdale, however they had coughed up big bucks to purchase one of four large patio homes that had both ocean and golf course views, located off by themselves in a cluster facing the fourteenth green and with a sweeping view of the

shoreline extending north toward Sadlers Slough. She really didn't know much about Dr. Myers, except that he traveled to foreign countries while his wife stayed home and she wasn't too happy about it.

After Billie rang off, my thoughts kept reverting back to the horrific scene at the bridge. Despite its inevitability, sometimes death comes unheralded, when least expected. A driver's momentary inattention on a quiet country road, natural gas slowly seeping toward an open flame, the crosshairs of a sniper's scope picking out a victim randomly from a crowd, the odds are finite but so small as to escape notice. Imagining the young woman playing the beautiful, challenging course, I am sure death was the last thing in the world on her mind. Mercifully the end was quick, small solace to those she left behind. They say you're not dead as long as you are remembered. I hoped the victim's family's and friends' memories were good. As far as a motive for her death, I suspected we could look into her past all we liked but it wouldn't help. This was another in a series of crimes where the victims were chosen randomly. I, too, mourned for the young Asian woman, who had the misfortune to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

To help dispel such gloomy thoughts, I started working through the calls from anxious residents that Mona thought I should handle personally. Most wanted to know what had happened and whether this and the forecasted mid-afternoon thunderstorms would affect the Gator Wilson golf exhibition. I said that there had been another accident on the course, and that its likely impact on the golf exhibition was unknown, which I suspect detracted somewhat from my image as a front-line player in the law enforcement and weather forecasting communities.

It wasn't long until Mona rushed in to tell me a garish red, white and blue van from Channel Six with a small satellite antenna on the roof was coming up the causeway. I told her to wave it through leaving it up to the assembled law enforcement folks to supply sound bites for the breaking news. Later in the morning my boss

showed up and I shared with him what little information I had. Uncharacteristically he showed his frustration.

“Damn it!” he interjected. “This thing is getting personal! After all the effort and time that’s been spent I’m not going to see years of work go down the drain because some nut case is building bombs and terrorizing the community. Get the television folks on the horn right away. Tell them Paradise Cay is offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for information leading to…you know the rest. And, I want you to do everything you can to find out who’s responsible. You don’t have to get my approval every time you turn around. Use your discretion. I trust you and leave it up to you to protect my personal interests and those of the community!”

Anger clearly reflected on his face, he stormed out of the office. In the silence that followed I thought: if the mysterious assailant hadn’t accomplished anything else, at least he’d made my boss lose his cool. But, he still seemed to be able to make fast decisions. I also passed on the necessary information by phone to two of the three area television stations, leaving it up to Darby Reynolds to work with whatever she could find on the police blotter.

The gentle, on-again, off-again rain reflected the somber mood in the office and once again I worked with Mona handling the phone lines. I could tell the whole thing was getting to her when ignoring the blinking lights she said, “Boss, I’ve had just about all of this I can take. I keep thinking of that poor woman and I have to ask myself: when is all of this going to end…no one seems to care about us what with all that’s going on…”

Looking at her I could see the tears in her eyes and realized that of all the people involved she was probably the most neglected when it came to being in the information loop. “Mona, look at me…I know it’s terrible. Believe me, I feel the same way. But, we’ve got everyone’s attention now, like when a cop is killed. In New York when things weren’t going anywhere in the darkest hour it seems like we would always get a break in the case. Believe me, we’re going to bring this guy down. That’s a promise! It’s getting close to

lunchtime, and two more deputies will be reporting in…why don't you take the rest of the day off."

"No way. I feel better now, realizing if I want to be a cop I've got to think like a cop. Maybe, just maybe, one of the calls I take will give us the break we need, and besides I see pizza coming in the door. It's nothing, thanks for listening…" she concluded with a sigh and a weak smile.

sFeeling more than a little guilty I left the office totally frustrated, setting out to find for myself exactly what was going on. Headed for Number Ten I arrived just in time for the *News at Noon*, to find out the heat index was expected to reach one hundred later that afternoon. Ashamed at myself for having to resort to the mass media for information about what was happening in my own bailiwick, munching a liverwurst and onion sandwich I watched the lead story now handled by news anchor, Chet Nobles, telling the world in the clipped, precise tones favored by communication arts professionals reporting bad news: "Early this morning on a dark and gloomy day the Mad Bomber of Paradise Cay struck again." Expanding the story were views of the "horrific death scene," Sheriff Perkins with a microphone shoved in his face saying a full investigation was underway, and several disjointed sound bites from "Concerned Residents." The only one I recognized was the animal rights lady who said like a lot of people she was afraid to leave the house, not totally consistent with her presence in the first row behind the tape the sheriff's department had set up around the crime scene. The video footage made me even more anxious to play an active role in the ongoing investigation. Tired of too few facts and too many incoherent interviews I headed back to the clubhouse.

Appropriating a golf cart from the shed I headed for the bridge, surprised by the lack of visible activity. A sheriff's deputy I knew from working in the office was on guard, getting little relief from the heat with only a gentle breeze coming in from the ocean. I asked him how things were going.

“What we’ve got now is the dog work” he observed disgustedly. “Those hotshot crime scene technicians are super busy when there’s up-front stuff to help justify their salaries, but I don’t have to tell you it’s people like us end up cleaning up after them. The lab guys were lucky they found enough left of the golf cart to identify it, but except for the roof it was mostly blown to bits. It’s like those fiberglass automobiles, they look great, but if you plow into something it’s all over. Anyhow, after the big wigs put their heads together the Sheriff announces on television they’re going to recover every bit of the cart and piece it back together like they do in a plane crash. There’s only one problem, I know because I’ve lived here all my life, used to fish in the slough. The tide’s been going out and by now most everything left of the golf cart has drifted out to sea. Does anyone listen to me? What do I know? The technicians go back to the lab to do their analyzing, and they take four guys from the duty roster, give them ponchos and waders and send them out with the insects and tell them to start looking, and don’t stop until they’ve found every piece. If that isn’t the height of stupidity, I don’t know what is. I’ll tell you one thing, I’m glad it’s them and not me,” he said, gesturing in the direction of the distant figures stooped over and groping in the mud like farm workers in a third-world country rice paddy.

“I feel for the fellas out there,” I said sympathetically. “But, I’d be happy to trade places with them. I’m responsible for security here, and I’d give my right arm for something to do, even digging in a swamp. Tell me, did they turn up any leads today that might help solve these crimes?”

“Near as I can tell, nothing. It sounds great, like the boss said: piece it all together. But that’s scientific BS for the reporters to help convince the public something’s really being done. I agree with the TV folks, we’ve got some nut case blowing up people for no good reason. And who knows when it’s going to stop!”

After thanking the deputy for his time, I returned to the cruiser. Seated behind the wheel I found myself unable to turn the key. The

deputy was not alone in believing the crimes to be the work of a madman, or perhaps a terrorist with a twisted view of reality. So, what does such a person look like? Male or female? Weight? Height? Long hair or short? White, black or other? Identifying features? Ask the normal questions and nothing comes to mind. In my experience criminals were caught by going out on the street and collecting information and pursuing leads, then putting the facts together. I have heard of detectives who claim they can put themselves into the mind of a killer, but to me the twists and turns of a mind predisposed to violent and impulsive behavior are beyond comprehension. I had to admit we could be dealing with someone striking out to inflict pain, injury, even death for perceived injustice, personal satisfaction, or whatever the reason. But, I couldn't form a mental picture of such a person or imagine how he or she would act. If such a killer was in our midst I didn't have a clue as to what to look for. Running out of ideas and taking note of the time, when heading back to the clubhouse my cell phone rang, It was Billie, telling me that Gloria Myers had agreed to talk to her, and she would feel better if I were present.

Surprised by the request, I turned on the siren and took off for the mainland.

Gloria Myers was fiftyish, stylishly decked out in a gray suit and white blouse with a fluffed up collar. Her hair was light brown with flecks of grey, styled to provide a carefree, windblown effect totally inconsistent with the morning's tragedy. Sad eyes looked up to engage mine, and in a voice that took me back to my roots she said, "I'm so glad they sent you. Please sit down." Lowering myself into the vacant chair beside her I waited for her to continue.

"Sergeant Greene, your call this morning came as a terrible shock. I apologize for putting you off, but now that I've had a chance to talk to my husband I thought it was best we meet. You may wonder why he isn't here. Let me just say this whole thing has been very hard on him, but he felt you needed to know what had happened as it might help shed some light on Daisy's death. I'll try to be brief

because I don’t want to leave him alone too long. Yesterday, things got off to a bad start when Phil woke up with an a-fib incident. An hour or so later I answered the phone and it was a woman asking for him. She told me she was a doctoral student and she had met Phil a couple of times at professional meetings. She also apologized for calling at the last minute, saying she had just arrived in the country, headed for a meeting in Atlanta later that week. So I buzzed Phil on the upstairs phone. A few minutes later he came downstairs feeling somewhat better and told me he was surprised to hear from her. But, he had invited her to stay overnight, which would not be a problem because she was going to rent a car. Anyway, Daisy, she was Chinese but that was her American name, arrived late in the afternoon, and after dinner she and Phil went into his study to go over some computer printouts. It was after ten when they quit and Daisy said she was tired and went straight up to bed. Phil didn’t say much until after pouring himself a stiff drink he told me she was concerned about the research she was doing for her doctoral degree. The problem was her uncle, a professor whose name I recognized immediately as Phil’s first boss from years ago and with whom he had been fighting over technical stuff ever since. I was once his departmental secretary, that’s how we met. Anyhow, Phil said her uncle had helped her with her experiments, which showed he was right and Phil was wrong in whatever they argue about. She didn’t agree and did the research over to discover her uncle had manipulated her data to make Phil look bad. Without letting on, she simply told her uncle she wanted to submit her original research, and he got very angry saying she would never get her degree. Since he was a member of her doctoral committee this meant he probably could carry out his threat, that’s the way things work in the academic world. Phil told her it would only make things worse if he got involved in the fight and not to worry about it because her future was more important than his past, that’s exactly the way he put it.

“This morning, I got up around eight to get things ready for the bridge club, finding Phil busy working in his study. He said Daisy was playing golf, and he had got her a tee time at seven. This

surprised me because neither of them had mentioned it the previous day. Anyhow, about an hour after we started playing, even though he was in the next room it was obvious that Phil was on the phone and having an argument with someone, and it got louder and louder. At the end of the rubber I excused myself to settle him down, what with his heart problems and all. Anyhow, he slammed down the phone, telling me you, Billie, had called and told him that Daisy had been killed by an explosion just like the first one except her golf cart blew up. With such dreadful news I told the ladies that because of a family emergency we would have to cancel bridge for the day. I then insisted that Phil take one of his medications and calm down because I was worried he might have a heart attack. Ignoring me, he told me the whole story, saying that that if things weren't bad enough already, you then asked him if by any chance he knew how to contact Daisy's parents. When Phil gave you a long international cell phone number you had trouble dialing that's when things went from bad to worse.

"Phil agreed to make the call telling her uncle she was dead. He was surprised that she was in America, but he was even more surprised to learn that she was dead. But, he really lost it when he you told him how she had died, which I felt was a little insensitive. Her uncle's reaction was to accuse Phil of murdering her to keep her research from ever being published. That's what got Phil so upset, even though the whole idea is so farfetched that no one would ever take the accusation seriously…."

I never got to hear the rest of Gloria's story because at that moment the phone rang. It was Red asking if Billie knew where Gloria was because he and his EMT's had just transported Phil to the hospital where he was in intensive care.

Sadly, he died at four fifty-seven that afternoon.

CHAPTER 22—PUTTING THE CART AFTER THE HORSE

Red later told me that after Gloria left to meet with Billie Phil had taken a turn for the worse, dialing 911 before he passed out on the upstairs landing. Not knowing where Gloria was he had finally called Billie, by chance finding the two together. He also said Phil's heart doctor was on duty at the time and it was he who later broke the news to her of his passing. Given her reaction the doctor then wrote out an order that allowed her under sedation to spent the night in the hospital.

The following morning when at breakfast Mel read me his obituary from the local paper: memorial service to be announced, no mention of a funeral. It did not include his age, although the brief item that made the national news said he was seventy-eight. Setting out for my office, the heavy rain had slacked off, the air still and heavy, a cluster of hungry gulls drifting over the waterway. When I arrived at the office Mona greeted me with a stack of phone messages, one from Billie marked "Urgent" on the top of the stack. Returning her call she said she had a morning meeting but she'd make it in time for lunch at one of the fancy restaurants I frequented. Shortly before noon a tired-looking Billie entered the office and after accepting a cup of coffee from my thermos she slumped in the visitor's chair and looked at me for a long time before saying anything. She was wearing the khaki shirt and dark green slacks favored by most of the deputies, and carrying a black leather organizer with a bunch of papers crammed inside. Maybe the weather had something to do with it but I found it hard to believe this was the poised, confident with-it woman of the past. Brushing aside a few strands of wayward hair out of her eyes she started. "Charley, I didn't sleep too well last night; think I'm coming down with something. Good news and bad news. The bad news is yesterday afternoon my boss made me the head of the task force to investigate these crimes. The flip side is I get to recommend task force members and for openers I asked for you and CSI-head Matty Matsuo, and agent Drummond if the Bureau will go along. So, let's get a table at that place with the big

windows and I'll bring you up to speed on how we're going to start."

"That would be a pleasant change," I announced. "The way people have been avoiding me I think my deodorant's been breaking down, leaving me to contemplate deep philosophical issues like if a person with multiple personalities threatens to commit suicide does this create a hostage situation?" My double-barreled attempt at humor failed, as Billie was already on her way out the door.

Arriving at the Horizon Grill we were given a table overlooking the golf course and completely out of character Billie ordered a gin and tonic. I followed suit with a mug of Sam Adams recommended by my buddy Fred who I assume still remembered me as a big tipper from off the interstate. Phil's death was the hot topic, focusing on his conversation with Daisy's uncle. Neither of us took seriously his accusation that Phil had somehow engineered her murder, especially since he was spending his declining years in some obscure university town in China and. But, given the Bureau's interest in Phil it was something we would have to pass on the Drummond.

Consulting some papers from her folder, she started, "Okay...first the forensics…not much there. You guessed it, same explosive, probably concealed in the battery compartment under the seat, same means of detonation. Any hard jolt would have set it off. Ms. Shen was a goner when she hit the bridge at the fourteenth hole. With its warped boards it's a real kidney-killer and the explosion was predictable at that point. Piecing together the golf cart was to keep the TV folks happy, but it did tell us that cart nineteen was the one that got it. You see where I'm heading now?" she asked looking up from her notes.

"Sure," I replied grinning. "All we've got left is to figure out how the late Miss Daisy got matched up with the lethal conveyance she was driving. That will lead us straight to the perpetrator and then we can all take a well-earned vacation," I said, settling back and hoping Billie would notice the subtle cinematic metaphor.

“Very funny,” she replied, sarcastically but accompanied by a chuckle. “My money’s on this being another randomly chosen victim and then we will be no closer to solving this thing than when we started. But enough of this, let’s go downstairs and visit your slimy golf pro. I have a hard time talking to him because he reminds me of my ex-husband and he frustrates me with his golf-speak. Personally, I don’t think he’s the sharpest knife in the drawer but then I’ve always thought golf was a dumb game,” she concluded as closing her organizer our food arrived. After thoroughly enjoying the French Dip sandwiches I ordered, obediently I followed her out the door, with the bounce in her step returning and again ready to do battle.

As we entered his office Dave Williams was talking on the phone, abruptly hanging up the receiver as we approached. “Damn suppliers….” he muttered uneasily, face reddening as if we had apprehended him doing something immoral or illegal. “I assume you’re here about our latest incident….” he continued tentatively.

“You bet we are,” said Billie. “And the Chief here has some questions to which he wants straight answers,” she snapped.

Assuming she meant to use the good cop-bad cop scenario, I asked in a friendly manner, “Take your time, Dave, tell us how Ms. Shen ended up with cart 19?”

“Better than that, I can show you,” he said, his face brightening. We followed the pro down the path to the cart shed, a long metal building next to the parking lot and artfully concealed by strategically placed greenery. The lights were on and a gangling youth with long straggly hair was using a hose to wash one of the shiny green carts.

“Everything starts with the signup sheet to reserve tee times, with a separate page for each day with the golfers spaced six minutes apart. There isn’t one for today because the course is closed, but I have yesterday’s sheet here. On it I put cart numbers beside the player’s names starting after the last number assigned the day

before, in the same order as they would tee off. Early in the morning Donny puts the carts out on the concrete pad in front of the clubhouse, the earliest ones in the first row—”

“All this stuff about assigning carts is fine,” Billie interrupted, “but a body ended up out in the swamp because you sent her out on a booby-trapped cart. Answer the question, how did she end up with that cart?”

Contemplating the cart sheet a puzzled look crossed the golf pro’s face. After studying it for quite some time he exclaimed, “I never assigned cart 19 to anyone. When Ms. Shen went out at 7:00 a.m. she was given cart 53, the first number to be assigned. To have reached cart 19 I would have to have gone past one hundred and started over again. But, not enough people were signed up for that to happen. Look for yourself if you don’t believe me, except…?

“Except what?” I asked.

“Well this beats everything. Someone changed the roster. There was a husband and wife tournament later that morning and I originally assigned cart 61 to the boss and his wife at nine, the high-powered one he normally uses. But that’s where things get complicated. The boss was all nervous about this thing with Gator and I was invited to join his party for dinner last night to review the final arrangements. When I got there he asked me if I would mind playing with Sylvia in the couples blitz as he had a lot to do and she really wanted to play. He said maybe it would work out for the best, because I might be able to help with her putting. So, do I turn him down? He’s the boss, But, here’s where it gets screwy! You can see that cart 61, assigned to Em and Sylvia, was erased and someone assigned them cart 92 instead. That doesn’t make any sense at all. Then Mr. Jones’ cart, number 61, was written in as the last assigned cart at three in the afternoon when he and Gator would have played their exhibition match. There was no need for me to schedule it for the afternoon because when it came in after the morning round we had planned to recharge the batteries and start it out again later that day,” he concluded wearily.

Billie and I both examined the roster, confused and unsure what to do next.

“Very helpful, but we still aren’t connecting,” Billie said. “Let’s talk to the guy who put out the carts and see what he has to say,” she suggested, her patience visibly wearing thin.

Dave raised his voice, looking in the kid’s direction. “Donny. Come over here. This is Sgt. Greene and Chief Adams and they’d like to ask you some questions.” The look of alarm that crossed the lad’s face told me he was no stranger to the authorities.

“Donny.” I said, continuing the questioning. “Think back to yesterday, when you put out the carts. Do you remember one being assigned to Mr. Jones?”

“Sure do,” he said confidently. “Mr. Jones plays with the fast cart, number 61 and yesterday morning I put it to go out last with him and Gator. So I put it out on the right in the last row. Hope I didn’t do nothing wrong?” he asked apprehensively.

Ignoring him I asked Billie, “Anything else you’d like from this witness?” Looking less than pleased about our progress so far she finally asked, “And how about cart 19, who’d you assign that one to?”

A puzzled expression crossed the youth’s face. “I don’t remember no cart 19. We started with like fifty, but it’s hard to remember, you know what I mean?” he concluded in a real conversation stopper.

Thanking him for his cooperation, looking at my watch I saw the seconds flying by with us spinning our wheels. Then, it suddenly hit me. I knew why we were at an apparent dead end in our investigation.

“We’ve been off on a wild goose chase! Follow me!” I announced confidently, hoping I hadn’t badly overplayed my hand. I went down the row of carts lined up numerically, many with snaking

cords plugged into the central electrical system like astronauts attached to the mother ship. Reaching our destination, I pointed out elatedly.

“There’s cart 19!” Just where I thought it would be!”

“But…I don’t understand….” spluttered the mystified golf pro, clearly confused.

“You will. I assume the unused carts yesterday were all returned to the cart shed. Right?” Dave nodded in affirmation. “Okay. Come with me,” I said walking back down the line of shiny green carts. “Look. What do you see?”

“I don’t see anything,” he replied, shaking his head.

“That’s the whole point. You see cart 60 and cart 62, but you don’t see cart 61,” I stated triumphantly.

“But, that’s impossible. It never went out. Where is it?”

“I don’t know where all of it is, but I do know yesterday there were some pissed-off sheriff’s deputies picking up pieces of it out in the swamp.”

“I must be stupid or something. I still don’t get it!”

“It’s very simple. The force of the explosion reduced the cart itself to pretty small pieces. One of them must have been used to identify the cart by number, by someone well versed in criminology but lacking the common sense to know what appears as 19 can also be 61—upside down!”

Still pondering the implications of my observation, I waved off any reaction by the astounded golf pro. “Now, back up. You originally scheduled cart 61 to go out at nine Sunday morning. And, even though Mr. Jones told you the night before he wasn’t going to play,

you never changed the roster?" I asked, looking up to observe his expression when answering.

"I already told you that, there was no need to change it," he answered sharply. "I assumed Mr. Jones' cart would be used by me and Sylvia...." Unable to continue, eyes widening, it was obvious he had reached the same conclusion I had moments earlier. "My God!" he cried, alarm in his voice, "That means— "

I completed his sentence for him "…if the roster hadn't been changed and the unfortunate Ms. Shen hadn't hooked up with that cart you and Mrs. Jones would both be lying side by side on slabs in the county morgue at this very moment."

"Whoa!" Billie cried. "You still haven't explained how Ms. Shen ended up with the lethal ride?"

Her question appeared to confuse the pro. "I don't know…it makes no sense," he replied uncertainly, the words stumbling out.

"Can I say something?" asked Donny sheepishly.

"If it would help...go ahead," stammered his boss, a look of utter disbelief on his face.

"The lady, you know, who got it, was the first to go out. But, maybe she didn't know no better thinking the last row was the first. If she woulda took her cart up front she woulda been okay. You know what I mean …." he concluded, his voice trailing off uneasily

"It happens occasionally," Dave said, "especially with someone unfamiliar with the system. The carts closest to the tee are in front, but the back row is what you see from the pro shop. It was early, the first tee time, and the starter hadn't arrived so there was no one to help her out. It was a mistake, that's all…."

"You're doing better, Dave, " Billie started, "although you're currently in second place behind the cart kid. Now, tell us when

could have the roster been changed with Mr. Jones cart being moved from its slot at nine in the morning to three in the afternoon, where Ms. Shen unfortunately took it by mistake."

"That's easy. I leave the roster at the front desk in the pro shop, and when Donny arrives he uses it to set up the carts and he returns it to the desk when he's done, making any changes, like if carts don't start or they are damaged. This means the changes were made after I left and before he picked up the sheet."

"And, when did you leave?" Billie asked, in a much more friendly tone of voice.

"I'm not sure, a little after six-thirty I guess." Settling back on his heels the golf pro appeared to have gained back some of his self-confidence.

After a long pause Billie looked at me and even though I was thoroughly confused at this point I felt compelled to ask yet another question.

"Dave, who do you think changed the cart roster? And, why?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," he said in a tone of voice that told me that was that.

Billie picked up on it, too. "I'm learning more about golf than I ever wanted to know, and we all need a break," she told the visibly relieved golf pro, looking to me to see if I had any objections. Sensing none, she added a final rejoinder aimed at the pro's departing figure, "God help you if we find out you've been lying!"

In the parking lot I was about to crank up the cruiser to take us back to my office when Billie's cell phone rang. The call was relatively short, the few comments she made giving no clue as to who it was or what was being discussed.

“I’ll be damned!” Billie said, “that was Gloria. Last night she was in a hospital bed under sedation, but that was her telling me tonight she would be on her way back to Long Island where her husband would be buried in the family plot. She didn’t know when she would return but she planned to sell the house and everything in it with the exception of items she was setting aside to be shipped to her. She said she was having an estate agent come in and set reservation prices on what was left and sell it at auction. She ended the call telling Billie that the murder accusation against her husband was a vicious lie, and she could prove it, but it was complicated and very sad, even hurtful to the point she didn’t want to think about it. She hoped we would understand, but she had to run.

Given the cryptic note on which she had ended the conversation we both agreed she would probably never return.

CHAPTER 23—GUESSING GAME

Telling Mona we had overdosed on coffee at lunch and we didn’t want to be disturbed unless it was something really important, we settled down in my office. For a long time neither of us spoke. Suddenly Billie’s features flattened and wide-eyed she exclaimed. “Charley, tell me if I’m wrong. Let’s start with something we all

know: a person or persons unknown booby-trapped that poor little undertaker's rental driver. That happened by chance. Anyone who was unlucky enough to have received that bag of clubs would have bought the farm whenever they pulled out the lethal club. Okay?"

"Right on, the act of a terrorist." I added.

"Okay. Now stay with me. The second incident in which Ms. Shen lost her life we know for sure the explosive was identical to that used to juice up the golf club. But, was that also the act of a terrorist? I argue it wasn't, inasmuch as the booby-trapped cart was one originally assigned to Mr. Jones. But, this doesn't necessarily mean that he was the victim? Are you following me?"

"All the way," I said. "And, it further follows that if the last attack was specifically targeted, the first incident was to make us think the second incident was also the work of a terrorist, when in fact it was not."

"Probably," Billie said, settling back in her seat, "because that slime-ball golf pro says someone then changed the cart roster in the office, reassigning the death cart to the 3:00 p.m. tee time for Mr. Jones and Gator. Logically, Dave and Sylvia, Mr. Jones' choice, were the more likely victims, because why would someone want both Em and Gator out of the way, unless one or the other were collateral damage? Regardless of whether or not the changes make any sense, let's agree they provide positive proof that the victim in the second incident was not chosen totally randomly like in the first incident. Granted Daisy was unlucky in that it was by chance she was killed by an explosive originally intended to kill someone else, but the point is the whole incident was planned in the first place. So, we just don't throw up our hands. Instead it is up to us to discover exactly when, how and why the changes were made. And, it also tells us that there's a mastermind who planned the murders with something specific in mind. So, where do we go from here? I was really impressed by the profiler who talked to us recently. What say we try to develop a profile of our killer?"

I was about to answer when the intercom buzzed with Mona saying it was a call for Billie. Taking the receiver she listened while reaching across to spell out the letters “F-B-I” with her finger on my desk blotter, at the same time asking, “Is it okay if Charley turns on the speaker phone so we can include him, too?” Hearing his resonating voice I had correctly assumed it was Agent Drummond, and without any introduction he started, “Charley, glad you’re in on this. I was just telling Billie I can’t be a member of the team, but this doesn’t mean we won’t help. Plus, we haven’t been exactly sitting on our hands, so let me tell you some of the good stuff. First of all, we don’t think Ms. Shen was the intended target in the latest incident, however we do not believe her visit came as a complete surprise to Dr. Myers. Backing up this claim is a copy of a two year-old letter from him from her student folder recommending her for a fellowship. Some of the supporting information clearly suggests that he had been in contact with her that recently, and before that on some other occasions when they both attended the same academic meetings. Given Dr. Myers top-secret security clearance and his research in an area with national security concerns, it’s obvious why we were interested, but his death clearly changes things. Now for a new item. Originally, we didn’t think Dr. Orwell was involved in any substantive way. While he was the inventor of the explosive agent, in our opinion he was neither the supplier nor the user. But, we have since learned his father was a successful dealer in heavy equipment: cranes, dozers, backhoes, graders and stuff like that. In any event in the early sixties there was an accident involving a dragline he leased to a large contractor, one worker losing his life and, several others injured. Even though his father strongly argued the contractor was liable, because of operator error and poor maintenance, a jury felt otherwise and being underinsured the subsequent award bankrupted him. He died a few months later of a heart attack. Perhaps you’d like to guess who the contractor was who got off the hook?”

Noting Billie’s blank expression, I answered, “From the time-line I’d guess it was Emlyn Jones, Senior. Are you are implying it wasn’t totally by chance Dr. Orwell shows up over thirty years later

buying a condo from the same happy folks who bankrupted his dad ?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying. At the time, Jones Senior operated under a different trade style, Global something or other, and he was still working mainly with theme parks. The whole thing was handled by lawyers and insurance companies. Onslow was away at college, so it’s entirely possible he’s never made the connection. But, that’s the least important thing I have to discuss with you guys today” he noted, my interest scale now turned up to ten. “Recently we turned up another interesting character in your area, one Koresch Karyl, a resident of Altima County. Do you know him?”

Clearly this was a question for Billie to handle. “Character pretty well describes that guy but what I have is largely gossip. Hit me with the facts,” she requested, obviously pleased in the direction things were heading.

“Well, the elusive Dr. Karyl first came to the Bureau’s attention in the Stormy Sixties as a behind-the-scenes guy hanging out with the Berkeley crowd. Before that it was like he didn’t exist so the name is probably phony. It’s likely he had a prior record but he was very careful never to get arrested and fingerprinted, and all we have is a couple of fuzzy photos taken at mass demonstrations—beard, straggly hair—could be anyone. We also learned that he keeps in touch with his left-wing buddies by ham radio, but since he keeps on changing his call letters it’s pretty hard to keep track of him. For the next twenty years his name surfaced on the membership lists of various left wing organizations, however, there is no record of anything in the way of gainful employment. Then in the late-eighties we got a break when one of our undercover guys fingered him as being at the scene of a fire set by animal rights activists in a pharmaceutical lab. But, the company refused to prosecute and our hands were pretty much tied. Right after that he dropped out of sight for several years only to resurface when we searched our records for your area. Now I suppose you’re wondering what we did on the basis of all this information?”

“I’m afraid to ask,” Billie replied facetiously.

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing. There wasn’t anything we could really charge him with and nobody in law enforcement had heard a peep out of him since his disappearance. And, while his neighbors think him a little odd much of what they say is based on his bizarre appearance and eccentric ways. For example, he doesn’t talk much, and then only in a thick foreign accent not making much sense, and he’s distinctly anti-social. We’ve looked at his bank records. He seems to live modestly and within his means. His initial balance was less than two thousand bucks, and he lived hand to mouth for a couple of years until his computer business took off. But three years ago he took a real hit. Are you aware of what happened?” he asked tentatively.

“You mean when the aforementioned Dr. Orwell showed up and was fixing their computers practically free, kind of like the free enterprise system in reverse,” I answered.

“Right on. It doesn’t appear the two ever met, but in trying to tie him to your crimes we reasoned if he was upset with the situation his anger would logically have been directed toward Dr. Orwell and not the community at large, although that’s a possibility since it appears your boss Em canceled his repair contract and banned him from the island. We really can’t pin anything on him because he’s essentially a law-abiding citizen, albeit an eccentric one, but that’s no crime. Anyhow, to make a long story short, we waited until this morning to act, and that’s why I’m calling you now. Hold on a minute….”

While waiting Billie went out and got us a couple of sodas.

“Sorry about that, had another call. Anyway, back to Karyl. This morning we decided to bring him in for questioning. When the agents got there, guess what they found? Nothing. The good Doctor had flown the coop. All he left behind was a collection of broken-down electronic devices: computers, printers, television sets, VCR’s, satellite dishes, ham radios, you name it, he’s trashed it. As

far as personal effects, there were none. It was as if he never existed. We questioned the only person in a position to know anything about his movements, an eighty-three year old woman whose house is located where the dirt road leading to his place leaves the main highway. She's a nosy old biddy but unfortunately her eyes aren't all that good so she's a less than reliable witness. Her rear and side windows overlook the dirt road and she says he left in his old beat-up panel truck about eight yesterday morning, never to return. She was sure it was him because her house provides a view of the driver's side for departing vehicles. Then, she reported something unusual. About six thirty yesterday afternoon, a dark colored sedan turned into the driveway. Because of the direction it traveled she didn't get a good look at the driver, but she figured it was someone dropping off a computer to be fixed. Now, here's the odd part. She's positive the car didn't leave until a little before nine Tuesday morning. She's a light sleeper and she heard nothing during the night. All she could tell us was the driver was a white, dark haired male, and she was positive it wasn't Dr. Karyl. Right now they're combing the place for prints and anything else of interest and if we learn something we'll be in touch. Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

"Well I guess the big question is whether you guys look on Dr. Karyl's bugging out as an admission of guilt?" Billie asked.

"I don't know. Guilty of what? He can't be the perpetrator because there's no record he or his pickup truck were on the island after the system on the gate was installed. But, he could have been the supplier of the explosive, although so far we haven't anything supporting that. I wish I could give you an opinion based on more than we have right now. We'll go over his shack with a fine tooth comb looking for anything to tie him to your crimes. We'll also run his fingerprints through our system and see if we get a hit. Meanwhile, you guys keep snooping around at your end. Maybe we can help each other—maybe not. It all depends on whether our interests and yours coincide. I hope you understand. Take care."

As usual, the dial tone signaled Drummond's abrupt ending. I decided that as sincere as he had sounded, Agent Drummond again had been less than straightforward, his hasty signoff designed to forestall any more questions. I was not entirely sure what kind of game he was playing, but it seemed the more he leveled with us, the less I trusted him.

Getting a refill of my now cold coffee I pointed out to Billie that I had never met the elusive Dr. Karyl, making it difficult to think of him in real terms as the motive force behind the island's violent crimes. Responding to Billie's earlier suggestion that we try to develop a profile of the perpetrator, instead I said why didn't we try to develop a list of suspects and possible perpetrators before we did any serious profiling.

Turning to a blank page in the black leather-bound notebook she pulled out of her pocket, it remained for Billie to break the long silence that followed. "I'll start with a no-brainer," she said, pen poised, "Emlyn Jones the Second as a victim. Now you take over—think of people who would want him out of the way and why?" she asked, at the same time writing down his name.

"Going back to agent Drummond's phone call, I hate to admit it, but Dr. Orwell has a distinct motive, provided he knew about what happened to his father."

"I agree, he's on the list. Now, let me add someone else who may have wanted him out of the way, his wife, Sylvia," Billie continued.

"Other than the fact that hubby might have a roving eye, especially where Trish Holifield is concerned, can you think of any other reason my boss's wife might consider murder, alone or with help?"

"Charley, I think the 'help' part is where we start to connect. I've written down her name. Guess my candidate for the position of murderer's assistant?" she asked, looking up from her notebook.

“Another no-brainer: your buddy Dave Williams, a ladies’ man whose time is running out for the big score to set him up permanently. If he and Sylvia are really a ‘thing’ I could see them getting together on this. With hubby gone then they sit back and carve up the whole ball of wax. Okay, it’s my turn now: not one victim, but two: Emlyn and Sylvia Jones.”

“Husband and wife…interesting…and who’s the suspect?” Billie asked.

“Em’s brother, Red. Emlyn Jones the second was his father’s sole heir, and in the event of his death his wife inherits. But, if they both die he has a funky will that means he gets everything. Red is part of the Jones family and his brother pays his bills, but he’s never cut him into the money. Given his present interests and his economic situation, it’s not that strong a motive for murder, but let’s add Red to the list.”

“Oaky. Also, don’t forget that someone tried to prevent the Joneses from getting the booby-trapped cart—if you believe that slimy golf pro. My turn now. I’m going to suggest another victim, Daisy Shen,” announced Billie.

“I’m confused,” I started. “Because in fact she is a victim, there’s no doubt about that. However, I complete reject her uncle’s charging Phil with her murder. If Daisy’s research didn’t support Phil’s position, why would she have visited him in the first place? Couple this with Gloria saying that she could prove that it was impossible for Phil to have murdered her and it makes no sense to even consider adding him to our list.”

“No problem,” Billie replied. “As a potential victim, here’s one you may think is far out, but it’s not: Gator Wilson.”

“Gator Wilson!” I exclaimed incredulously. “He was just visiting for a day. Who on earth would want him out of the way?”

“Two people. The Trostles, that’s who. I know something you don’t,” Billie confessed. “Before he left we asked Gator who would benefit in the event of his death. After naming his wife, the kids, the usual, he said his niece, Tara, was down for a cool million dollars. It’s no secret this guy’s net worth is in the twenty to thirty mil range, and as construction foreman Mr. Trostle likely knows something about explosives. I don’t find it hard to believe they’d kill for a million bucks.”

“Me neither. Add their names to the list. Your turn, anything more?”

After a short pause to collect her thoughts, she replied, “Okay. Let’s add Sylvia Jones to the list again, not as a suspect but as a potential victim. Her husband emerges as a viable suspect if he wants to spend his declining years with the gorgeous Ms. Holifield —an updated, younger version of his second trophy wife. Divorce would predictably cost him. Dearly! I’m not quite sure what that stuff about changing golf carts is all about, but it’s something else we need to look into.”

“I agree. Add one more, you just mentioned her, Trish Holifield, the hot number at the front desk with the bedroom eyes. I’m not sure where she fits in, but it’s not unreasonable to assume she’d like to cash in her chips as the third Mrs. Jones the second, I’ll keep working on this one. So what happens now?” I asked, anxious to move on.

Shaking her head she let out a long breath before replying. “I’m not sure. Seems to me now we need to start checking where everyone was the night before the murder.”

“Right on.” I answered quickly, glad to hear the word “we,” reinforcing my status as a team member. It didn’t take her long to split up the suspects. She said she’d take Dave Williams and Red with me taking Dr. Orwell, the Trostles, my boss and his wife. This left the elusive computer guy up to the FBI because he’d bugged out, I’d already taken care of Trish with my visit to the beach, and

with Phil's passing he was out of the picture, although when Gloria returned she might be able to clarify any role he might have played in the matter. With the afternoon slipping away Billie packed up her notes, giving me a thumbs up as she headed for the door.

Settling back in my office chair I recalled that only this morning I had been unable to come up with any kind of profile for the killer. Now, we had more suspects that firewood stacked up outside a mountain cabin, and I wasn't sure what to do next.

But, of one thing I was certain. We were off and running.

CHAPTER 24 Change of Scene

In desperate need of a change of scene I headed out the coast highway on the off chance the Trostles might be home. Nearing my destination I spotted an exhausted, sweat-covered figure gasping for breath, colorful running shoes pounding the pavement. It was Ms. Trostle returning from a postprandial run, on display in a magenta training bra and shiny black spandex pants they apparently didn't have in her size, her sculptured suburban-blonde frosted tresses bouncing like in television hair spray commercials. Pulling off the highway I stepped out to greet her, taking off my cop sunglasses and striking a pose like in a scene from *Chips*.

"I confess, officer, I'll go quietly," she gurgled delightedly, eyeing me up and down like she was making an appraisal for *Antiques Road Show*. "What, pray tell, brings you and your shiny police car out this way?"

"Just a routine investigation, Ma'am," I said flatly, shades of *Dragnet*. "I need to talk to you, and if you like we can talk right here."

"Wouldn't think of it, Chief. With all this heat let's go to the house and have something cold," she suggested, measurably increasing

my anxiety quotient. Creeping along behind her in the cruiser, we soon we reached a small ranch home at the end of the pavement. Grabbing my arm, she pulled me in the direction of the front door which opened abruptly to reveal a short, fiftyish, balding, out-of-shape figure in blue jeans and a white T-shirt who cut loose in a deep voice inconsistent with his stature.

“You’re the new rentacop,” he said extending his hand. “Heard a lot about you, some of it good. Come on in and take a load off.” Following him into the igloo-cold atmosphere of the small living room I decided Mr. Trostle was probably quite effective in managing Mr. Jones construction crews.

In short order Tara returned to press into my hand a frosty glass decorated with colorful marine flags and with a lime slice precariously clinging to the rim. The first sip hit like a sledgehammer, clearing my sinuses and working its way with explosive force through the rest of my system. “Long Island iced tea,” she explained, “it’s our favorite and I figured you’d like it as you’re from up North.” I set the glass aside and mumbling my thanks proceeded to explain the purpose of my visit. Our initial bonding a thing of the past, husband Wink sat back and glared while his wife carried the conversation. Yes, I agreed it was terrible something like that should have happened to cancel what would have been a most memorable event in the island’s golfing history. And, switching gears rapidly, I said to help bring the perpetrator to justice we needed to know everyone’s whereabouts Monday night.

“That’s all you want?” Tara replied, relief in her voice. “No problem. Wink and I left around two p.m. for Jacksonville to meet my uncle. He flies his own private jet. His plane was an hour late but he insisted we return by the scenic route down the coast. We stopped for dinner at a restaurant off the main drag, figuring no one would recognize him. But Gator can’t go anywhere without people asking him for autographs, wanting to buy him drinks, and you wouldn’t believe some of the offers he gets from his lady fans,” she said quietly, eyes averted and blushing slightly.

“Tara!” her husband said firmly. “Spare us the gory details. Just stick to the facts.”

“Sorry. Anyway, north of Daytona we stopped to visit some race driver friend of Gator’s, a really cool guy. He had this huge house on the ocean and we had a great visit. Maybe too great,” she added reflectively, smiling weakly. “When we left we still had a ways to go. I was pretty tired and fell asleep, so Wink will have to tell you the rest,” she said, moistening her lips and looking in her husband’s direction.

“Gimme a moment to think,” he said gruffly, stalling for time, slumped down in his chair, brows furrowed, chin on his chest looking like his horse had finished dead last. I wrote it off as an act and patiently awaited his reply. “It was about one-thirty or so when we reached the island. Your guy should know because he asked Gator for his autograph. I didn’t think that was right. When we got home Tara went straight to bed. Gator then broke out this great rum he bought in Hawaii and we stayed up shooting the breeze. I don’t know what time we hit the sack, but it was too late because I was wasted the next morning. That’s it….” he broke off, shrugging his shoulders, eyes guarded, daring me to ask another question.

“You’ve covered what you did pretty well,” I admitted. “Now, maybe you can help us even further in our investigation. Since Mr. Jones and Gator were scheduled to use the booby-trapped golf cart later in the afternoon there’s a possibility one of them could have been the intended victim,” I said, noting Tara paling visibly at my words. “Can you think of anyone who would have a motive to murder either Mr. Jones or Mr. Wilson?”

Both the Trostles pondered my question. Still having trouble recovering her composure, Tara turned away, eyes downcast and afraid to meet mine, her features registering both fear and surprise. “No. I can’t,” she finally replied in a near whisper, hands twisted in her lap.

“How about you, Mr. Trostle?” I asked.

“Beat’s me!” he snarled. “I don’t know much about my boss’s personal life and I’ve only met Gator twice. He seems like a nice guy, not at all stuck up,” he concluded, emptying the rest of his drink’s fiery contents in a single gulp.

Agreeing with him, I decided not to pursue the matter any further. Adopting two very different strategies, it was apparent the Trostles had closed ranks and that I would get little from further questioning. Noting the time and abandoning the rest of my beverage I made my way back to the car.

Still in the driveway, I dialed my boss to see if he was available, receiving a terse “no” from Ms. Watson who put me into his voice mail. Then, I took my last shot, dialing Dr. Orwell. He didn’t answer, and I left a message on his machine to call me on a matter of some urgency. Frustrated, I returned to the office to check my own voice mail for messages. All but one were from island residents concerned about the most recent murder and its potential impact on their lives and golf playing habits. But it was the last message that really got to me and cutting off roving reporter Darby in mid-sentence I cranked up the cruiser for a neighborhood patrol to help collect my thoughts before heading home for supper, late again.

Even though the scattered rain showers of the past couple of days had played havoc with earlier outdoor patriotic displays, their replacements while less elegant than those reserved for national holidays were still more numerous and, to me, more genuine, less contrived. There were simple flags instead of artfully draped bunting, mass-produced plastic signs instead of arts and crafty straw-stuffed Uncle Sams, the sincerity of the statement taking precedence over elegance of expression. However, there was also evidence the new found wave of patriotism occasioned by the attacks was less than universal. The bombastic Ms. Nettles was now focusing her heart and soul on her new role as anti-war protester, with her sparsely attended nightly candlelight vigils around the base of the Loop tower briefly augmented by the

announced arrival of a television crew that provided carefully-edited footage of the protest, conveniently ignoring the trampled flowerbeds and the scattered detritus deposited on the Pedestrium. Also overlooked was an enigmatic offshoot of the demonstration, the distribution of a petition charging the Island News with profiteering from price hikes for American flags and other patriotic merchandise.

Entering Number Ten from the garage, Mel was waiting with the ingredients needed to make us dry martinis, an appropriate response to the hectic day winding down. I mentioned that I had been out interviewing suspects. But, considering I had a Sam Adams at lunch and then had consumed part of the Trostles high-octane concoction I decided a pass on the evening's libation was in order. Giving me a quizzical look, without comment Mel went about preparing supper.

Badly needing a change of scene we caught the late show at the Island Cinema, a just released flick, *Don't Say a Word*, featuring Michael Douglas whose daughter was kidnapped to force him to get a secret number from a disturbed young woman so some bad guys could get back a priceless jewel stolen from them—you get the idea. Anyhow with the endless previews more than two hours later we finally joined the little band of departing moviegoers on the sidewalk.

Arriving home, the weatherman told us we could look forward to closing out yet another week with rain and thunderstorms, and if we were lucky we might see the sun next Monday. Mel said she very much doubted it, and on this happy note we went upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER 25—GONE FISHIN’

The faint pallor of dawn was creeping across the eastern sky close to the horizon when halfway between sleep and wakefulness I heard the electronic chirping of my cell phone. It was my boss returning my call. “Hope you weren’t sleeping,” he started.

“No problem. I had to get up to answer the phone,” I said, a good line I had used before. “I’m assisting the police in their inquiries and they would like me to talk to you, and Sylvia, too, preferably as soon as possible. I thought it would help if we could make it today?”

“Maybe. One reason I called you so early is because with all the mass media attention this thing is getting I’ve had it up to here and I didn’t plan to be in the office today. Sylvia and I are going fishing. Why don’t you and Mel join us. It appears there’s a break in the weather from all the rain we’ve been having, although we’ll have our usual afternoon thunderstorm. As a matter of fact we had been meaning to ask you both, but things have been so hectic lately we’ve been doing very little entertaining.”

Thinking over the delicate nature of many of the questions I would be forced to ask, I thought it best to try to keep things on a businesslike basis. “That would be fine. But I’m afraid Mel’s a little under the weather this morning,” I came back quickly, noting her obvious displeasure as she glared at me across the bed. “Where shall I meet you?”

“Slip twenty-eight, Island Marina. How soon can you be there?”

“Soon enough,” I replied. “Don’t leave without me.” Hanging up I searched for something stylishly sporty while explaining the situation to my wife. Pulling the covers over her head she turned over and appropriated my side of the bed, facing the wall. I couldn’t tell whether she was mad or maybe just tired. In any event

I couldn’t hang around. Batten down the hatches—I was going fishing!

Arriving at the marina I was pleased to note the overcast that would hopefully keep down the temperature, but the humidity was already approaching oppressive and threatening to climb even higher. Wending my way past the red and white sign limiting access to registered boat owners and guests, I proceeded past the smaller berths housing a glittering display of watercraft right out of the showroom with names like *Party Girl*, *Our Dream II*, *My Way*, and *Brendon’s Folly*. One I noticed particularly had a bronzed silver fox revving up the engine for a posing bikini-clad passenger up front, appropriately named *Four Play*. Slip twenty-eight was at the far end, actually two berths were needed to handle the gleaming white motor yacht, sweeping hull proudly bearing the name *Paradise II*, superstructure sporting an impressive array of electronic equipment. The boat glistened in the early morning sun, woodwork shining, bright blue mathematically- spaced fenders protecting it from the carpeted dock as it rocked gently at its moorings. I saw my boss disappearing into the main cabin carrying an oversize cooler chest, while his wife, Sylvia, sunglasses perched atop blonde curls, watched from the dock. Turning, she greeted me with a dazzling smile. “Chief Adams. My husband has told me so much about you, and how…er…helpful you’ve been to him.”

Seeing an assortment of tote bags at her feet, I gathered them together and followed her onto the vessel, tight jeans and a slim waist suggesting regular exercise, plain white shirt with the top two buttons undone displaying the boat’s name, exuding the not unpleasant scent of coconut. When I entered the main cabin I was greeted warmly by my host who immediately took me on the grand tour. In short order I learned the immaculate watercraft was a forty-six foot Sea Ray Convertible *Sportfisher*, powered by twin 375 horsepower engines, recently replaced. Sensing my surprise, he explained that twenty-three years ago his father, recovering from a stroke, had traded in a smaller boat for this one, celebrating the completion of the Paradise Cay project.

“I still remember him bringing this beauty into the marina for the first time,” he said proudly, a faraway look in his eyes. “And, to this day I still think of my dad every time I take it out,” he added, showing me a human side I had never seen before.

Sylvia and I handled the lines when we cast off, and I joined my boss on the flying bridge that rose majestically skyward, crowned with a towering modernistic superstructure and operator’s console giving it the appearance of something out of *Star Trek*. The resident gull population followed us as we slowly traversed the “No Wake” zone out of the marina. “We’ll be reaching open water soon,” my boss said as he advanced the engines slightly, “but we still need to stay in the channel because of the buildup around the entrance to the inlet, over there where you see the waves breaking.” Turning on a green-hued radar screen he consulted it briefly, pointing out the sandbars by the sea buoy. Choosing business before pleasure I reminded him of what I was doing and asked if I could interview Sylvia first. He agreed and grabbing the gleaming side rails as the boat rocked in the tide I made my way down to the main cabin. I explained to my boss’s wife that the investigation was now focusing on anyone who could give us useful information about the continuing crimes occurring on the island. Figuring it would be less disruptive than someone from the Sheriff’s office, I said there were a few questions I would like to ask, warning her a couple of them might be personal. She said she had no objections.

“Mrs. Jones, to start with I’d like you to think back and give me an account of what you did Sunday night, from about six o’clock on?”

Lighting a long, thin cigarette with a shiny silver lighter she settled back in her chair, pushing back a wayward strand of hair as if it could improve her memory, not visibly nervous but I suspected not as calm as her outward appearance might have led one to believe. Looking me right in the eye, she started, voice level raised to be heard above the engine. “Em and I had our usual reservations for the seafood buffet. When my husband conducts business he uses his private dining room, but Sunday night he likes to wind down

and mix with the crowd. My brother-in-law arrived around five thirty for cocktails. I had to remind them more than once our reservation was for six and that we had invited Dave Williams and the Trostles to discuss final plans for the golf exhibition. Em was really uptight because of the mess last time. I wasn't worried about our reservation but I was concerned about keeping our guests waiting. Em said it wouldn't matter as long as the bar stayed open. We took separate cars but arrived together. We stuffed ourselves as usual and it was very close to eight when we left. I know because there was a movie we wanted to watch on television. After that Em turned on the Marlins game, so I checked my email and looked up some recipes on the internet. Around eleven the game ended, he locked up and we both went upstairs. That's it."

She paused while I completed the notes I was making. "Very good. Now, an important question. Did either you, your husband, your brother-in-law or anyone else at your table leave the restaurant at any time before or during the meal?"

"No," she answered quickly.

"That includes everyone now. You're absolutely certain. None of you left for any reason, to make a phone call, even to go to the rest room?"

This time she took a little longer to reply. "Well Mrs. Trostle and I went to the rest room together, but as far as leaving the restaurant my answer is the same. We had a great time, we talked a lot. Em and Red were reminiscing about the family and when they were kids. No one left. I'm sure of it."

"Fine. Now I have to ask this, and I apologize. You don't have to answer. Are you aware of the rumored relationship between your husband and Trish Holifield?" I asked bluntly, thinking of no other way to ask the question.

"Chief, you look so worried," she said, half-smiling, twinkling eyes locked on mine. "You are into island gossip. Of course I've heard

the rumors, and just between us—I know they're true. Don't look so shocked. The Joneses have always had a roving eye, it's in their genes. You don't think I'd really murder my husband just because an attractive woman twenty years younger than he is throws herself at him? I don't like it, but it's happened before and it will probably happen again. But, not too many more times because lover boy's starting to lose a little of his zip in that department," she concluded knowingly, idly fiddling with the large diamond-encircled black pearl ring on her right middle finger.

"OK. I'll buy that. Now, last question. Is there any truth to the rumor that you might be involved with Dave Williams?" Again I paused, not sure how she would react to such a personal question.

My relief was apparent when she replied. "Absolutely not! I have very little natural golfing ability, and I had hoped if I played better this might give me and Em something more in common. Dave's a jerk, but he's not a bad teacher. However it hasn't helped any because the only time Em plays with me is those stupid husband-wife things when he gets mad if I don't hole everything within twenty feet."

Realizing I was batting five hundred in verifying rumors and that I hadn't insulted my boss's wife to the point I had endangered my job, I decided on one final question to help defuse the threat level. "Mrs. Jones, by any chance did you happen to see either Trish Holifield or Dr. Orwell at the buffet."

"No I didn't," she answered quickly. "Trish wasn't working that night and the only time I've seen Dr. Orwell in the clubhouse is when he works on the computers. He's not married and he's not very sociable. Gives me the creeps to be honest," she concluded distastefully.

Thanking Sylvia for her cooperation I returned to the flying bridge noting that the mainland was rapidly disappearing in the haze and the ocean had changed color. "The weather's holding and we're hitting deeper water," Em said, consulting the colorful rack of

displays in front of him. “Have to if we’re going to have any chance at dolphin and sailfish, although listening to the radio no one seems to be catching much. Got a promising lead though, we should be there in about twenty minutes. So, go ahead with your questions.”

I started by asking about his whereabouts for the time in question and I found him to be in total agreement with his wife’s account of the evening. He was equally certain, none of them had left the restaurant. He also added something his wife hadn’t mentioned, that when they were preparing to leave his brother was joined by Cecelia Wentworth, who had been working that evening. They walked together to the parking lot, Cecelia left first in her car, Red following in his truck. Em was behind them on the loop road until they both turned off for the causeway, headed for the gate house presumably on their way to her place up the coast. He and his wife then went directly home, and he confirmed her account of how they spent the rest of the evening. With their stories dovetailing so far then I proceeded to a critical part of the interview.

“Now, a more general question. When did you decide you weren’t going to play Monday morning? Was it before or after dinner?”

“Sylvia and I had talked about it earlier in the day, but I didn’t actually make the decision until we were on our way over to the clubhouse.”

“And did you mention it at dinner?”

“Yes, I did,” he answered quickly, “but only after Dave first agreed to take my place. I didn’t make any formal announcement, just mentioned it in table talk. But I did make it clear this freed me up to help with any problems in case things started getting out of hand with the golf exhibition.”

Not wishing to pursue the matter further, I proceeded to the most delicate questions of the interview, offering the option of not

answering. He said he had no problem with any question I might ask.

“First, is there any truth to the rumor that you have more than a passing interest in Trish Holifield?” I asked, worried about my boss’s response to such a personal question. “That’s something I don’t want to discuss. Let’s just say that any assumptions along the line suggested won’t prove to be very productive. Enough said,” he stated flatly.

Given his less than responsive answer to my last question, I gritted my teeth before continuing. “OK. Last question. Your reaction, again to gossip, that your wife might have an interest in Dave Williams extending beyond golf lessons?”

“I’ve heard that too, but never placed any stock in it to the point of bringing it up with her. For quite some time my wife and I have always had a somewhat distant relationship and if she’s playing around with that washed-up college golfer, more fool her. She’s had a few little flings in the past but in my own way I love her and forgive her. Even if the rumor is true, that clown’s no threat to our marriage. She knows which side her bread’s buttered on and I’m not ready for a messy divorce, which under any circumstances would cost me a bundle.”

Pulling back sharply on the throttles, Em announced that we were nearing our destination, ending the interview. Breathing a sigh of relief, clambering down the ladder I waited for him to direct me to join Sylvia in one of the padded fighting chairs in the stern, assorted fishing rods and multi-hued lures a colorful display on the cabin wall behind us. After watching him lower the outriggers and deftly attach frozen baits to the huge feathered hooks, looking out over the rich blue Gulf waters I hung onto the rod tightly as my line hit the water. I wish I could say I came home with a trophy fish I could mount on the wall like my boss, but I did catch two dolphin, not Flipper but the other kind that show up in restaurants as Mahi-mahi. The largest one weighed in at twenty-one pounds and really fought as I dragged it in. We released both which Em said was the right thing to do. With the fishing not producing much we headed back about noon, on the way being treated to a surprisingly good lunch from stuff Sylvia scrounged up from a small on-board kitchen. The trip was a little bumpy as we met the waves head on, and tensed up while hanging onto the grab rails I was happy to return to the calm of the lagoon as we entered the marina.

Thanking my boss and his wife profusely after we had docked I cranked up the my cop car, not quite sure what to do with the rest of the day. Even though my offshore catch had been small, I reminded myself now was the time to go after some really big fish.

CHAPTER 28—THANK YOU FOR NOT SMOKING

With time on my hands I set off to see if by chance Dr. Orwell was home which would allow me to clear the last name from my list. The packaged landscaping and sectioned front sidewalk leading to his condo exuded familiarity, and the Avon calling chimes that brought him to the front door told me I was back in Palmdale.

Once inside, the model-home formality of my own condo was replaced by cozy functionality: bookcases occupying almost every inch of available wall space and a computer complex nestled in one corner, its electronic heart generating a festive array of pinpoint red and green lights. A dark green leather recliner, end tables and a sofa aimed at a giant-screen television with an impressive collection of stacked electronic components completed the precisely arranged furnishings. Prominently displayed over the entrance to the kitchen was a “Thank You for Not Smoking” sign. I’ve often wondered about the effectiveness of such signs as not being thanked strikes me as a small price to pay for lighting up. I accepted his offer of tea to find out it wasn’t the ice cold syrupy-sweet variety favored regionally, but home brewed, piping hot and served with sugar and cream. The fine china, silver teaspoons and linen napkins made it impossible to decline his hospitality even though hot tea is high on the list of things I go out of my way to avoid.

After comparing notes on the layout, furnishings and construction of our condos, I sensed his impatience and proceeded directly to the murders. “Dr. Orwell, I’m here today not only in an official capacity, but also to ask for your help. To start with, can you give me an account of what you did Monday?” I thought I knew so I wasn’t particularly interested in his answer.

“Certainly. I spent the day at The University of Florida attending a computer seminar, where I participated in a panel discussion in the afternoon—”

“Fine, I remember you told me,” I said. “Now, off the record, would you be willing to share with me any thoughts you might have about the crimes,” I asked invitingly, pretending to take a sip of my tea as I went through the motions to complete the interview.

Before he could reply, a small, tiger-striped cat launched itself up onto his lap. “This is Retort. Don’t be fooled, she’s not ‘*The Cat Who…*’ about to give us an important clue to help bring the perpetrator to justice,” he said smiling, kneading her fur as he spoke. “I’m sure you realize that in real life there aren’t armchair detectives who get their information from television and upstage the bumbling police by solving crimes. Having spent my life in the cloistered halls of academe I am unaccustomed to violence. However, I am an avid reader of mystery stories, especially police procedurals,” he said gesturing in the direction of the crowded bookcases. “Originally, I felt there had been far too much focus on the Mad Bomber theory, to the point I suspect it colored the whole investigation. But, now I’m not so sure. The possibilities are just too numerous. I don’t detect any real pattern; there’s no feeling of order. The two victims had absolutely nothing in common, except both were visitors to the island and they were golfers. It appears chance, and chance alone, determined who lived and who died. This suggests the murderer is someone who feels the need to strike out blindly for whatever the reasons, real or imaginary, rational or irrational. I’m sorry, but that’s as far as I can proceed on the basis of logic and what’s publicly known…just an old college professor rambling on.”

“I’ve been thinking a lot along the same lines,” I confessed, my interest aroused. Looking him squarely in the eye I continued, “Suppose you were me—what would you do now?”

“I’m not sure,” he responded, visibly uneasy, pausing to take a sip of his tea. “I wish you hadn’t asked. Clearly, your job is to collect verifiable information, ask questions, hope for a lucky break. I’ve tried very hard to sort out the facts, what’s known publicly. I can’t decide whether the situation calls for deductive reasoning or

whether following established police procedure is the route to go. Sometimes I get the impression of someone striking out blindly in anger, other times I dimly detect the presence of a fantastically clever mind at work. You're on the inside and I'm not, but perhaps you might appreciate a word of advice."

Even though advice is something I often ignore at my own expense, hearing no objection from me, he continued. "What I'm suggesting is based on my experience over the years as a scientist. One of the biggest challenges one faces is avoiding the twin tendencies to oversimplify, on the one hand, or to read too much into a situation, on the other. Separating fact from opinion I still feel that logical thinking may yet hold some promise in deciding whether the case is really closed. Perhaps you are overlooking some simple fact. But, as far as motive and suspects, as a detective I have to admit I'm a total failure."

Right on, I thought, that makes two of us. But, I still wondered if he knew the role the Jones family had played in his father's decline. I thought about asking him, but decided against it. Thanking him for his insights, I covered up my cup of tea with my napkin as a gesture of appreciation for his hospitality and headed for the door.

Contemplating the picture-perfect green lawn with its manicured flower beds it reminded me that my own patch of grass badly needed attention. Given my early start it had been a long day and I deserved something better than yard work as a reward. Heading for the clubhouse I decided that trying that new long putter Dave told me would shave three strokes off my score would be a far more productive use of my time.

To quote Scarlett "Tomorrow is another day…" and with Billie now breathing down my neck, who knows if I would ever have another chance?

Next day Billie decided to return the favor by having us meet for breakfast out in the country at a place of her choosing. Annie

Mae’s Cafe exemplifies a Southern anomaly: the backwoods hangout in the very heart of a more sophisticated society. On any given day sales engineers making appointments on their cell phones can be found rubbing elbows with bleary-eyed shift workers towing aluminum boats to favored fishing grounds, enjoying scrambled egg platters heaped high with strips of golden brown bacon and generous helpings of grits and soft fall-apart biscuits with jelly. I had asked Billie whether there really was an Annie Mae. She said in fact there was but the name had deeper significance being the title of a song by blues singer Little Milton. I said with my big-city background this was an unfamiliar name, however Billie assured me the man was a true legend in the world of country music.

Abandoning the patrol car next to a mud puddle on the edge of the overflowing parking lot heavily populated with pickup trucks, I opened the weatherworn front door that had not seen a paintbrush for many a moon. Looking over the crowded restaurant I decided since it was Saturday that was why I was one of the few persons present not wearing camouflaged clothing. No one paid any attention to me as I was confronted by the early-morning din of raised voices competing for attention, waitresses hollering orders into kitchen, the cash register singing a happy tune and for a festive touch: a long string of multi-colored Christmas tree lights unevenly strung along the back wall. Finally I spotted Billie at a far-corner table and waited while she patiently explained to an irate trucker she could do nothing about the scales being wrong. He finally left when she gave him a number to call, and I waited while the waitress rushed over to add a place setting: soap-streaked silverware barely contained in an undersized paper napkin. Attractively decked out in one of the forest green shirts favored by the deputies, the color bending well with her khaki slacks, Billie once again reflected the confident in-charge manner I had detected at our first meeting.

After the tired looking waitress took our orders, Billie took a couple of pages out of the folder she carried and tossed them in my

direction. “Read this,” she commanded

INTERVIEW: Mr. Winslow Jones

DATE/TIME: September 26, 2001 (13:23-13:28)

PRESENT: Mr. Jones; Sgt. Green

Q. Would you please state your name and address for the record.

A. *Winslow Allen Jones. 9 Palmdale Court, Paradise Cay, Florida.*

Q. Mr. Jones, you have signed a statement to the effect that you understand your rights. Do you further state that you have not been given anything or received any other inducement which might affect the truthfulness of your statements in this interview.

A. *That’s correct.*

Q. Mr. Jones. I know you are aware of the serious crimes in your community we are currently investigating. We are interviewing everyone who might be a potential suspect or victim or who might be able to help us. I would like to start by asking you to account for your movements from approximately noon on Sunday, September 23 through noon the following morning. Do you understand my question?

A. *Yes I do. Well, I played golf, around 3:00 p.m. I was just practicing and playing by myself, skipping a couple of holes to get around slow moving golfers. I ended up only playing twelve holes because on Sunday nights I always go over to my brother’s before heading out to dinner. I finished*

about five or so and then went home and changed. My brother, his wife and I had a reservation at the Grill. We got there about six fifteen or so. We ate dinner with a couple of other people. and I left with my girlfriend, Cecelia Wentworth. We went to her place up the coast. We drove in separate cars and next morning she left around seven because she had a busy day. I slept in and got back to the island a little before eleven.

Q. When did you arrive at your brother's house on Sunday evening?

A. *I don't know exactly. Somewhere around five-thirty. You could ask my brother.*

Q. Thank you. I will. So, you were at your brother's house for approximately an hour. Is that correct?

A. *Yeah. Again, ask my brother if you don't believe me.*

Q. What did you do while you were at your brother's house?

A. *We talked and I had a couple of beers.*

Q. I've heard that one before.

A. *If you're implying I was drunk, I wasn't. I was talking to my brother most of the time.*

Q. What about?

A. *Um. Family matters. Nothing special.*

Q. OK. That's another thing we'll have to verify with your brother and his wife

A. *Fine by me.*

Q. Finally, let me ask you. What do you think is the reason for the crimes at Paradise Cay and who do you think is behind them?

A. *Beats me. Maybe it's those terrorists. There's a lot of crazies who hate our country and who have it in for rich people. But, if people hadn't been killed I would have said it was almost like things kids sometimes do, like tearing up people's mailboxes. Things out here on the island aren't always what they seem, like the stories the real estate woman tells about our family. Money is what it's all about, and this place runs as smoothly as it does because a lot of good, hardworking people keep it going, and I'm one of them.*

Q. Thank you Mr. Jones. I assume you have no plans to leave the area for the next few days as we may want to talk to you again. That's all. You may go.

Handing the transcript back to Billie, I waited while the waitress delivered our food and Billie started, "Okay, Charlie, you know the guy better than I do, is he credible or not? The whole thing about the kids and mailboxes is a little off the wall. I'm almost certain he's hiding something, lying, or both, but I can't put my finger on it. I know he runs the EMTs, but that's not a full time-job. He's your buddy, what else does he do to pass the time?"

"Well, he's not exactly my buddy, my only real contact with him was when we played a round of golf last week. I know he does a good job managing the EMTs and he's also in charge of the volunteer fire department where they have a fancy fire engine to polish. He's a good golfer, and Mona tells me he's also into hunting and fishing with some of his redneck friends. When we played he talked some about his family, and his father, but it was like he finally decided he'd told me enough, even too much, and he quit."

“Charley, that’s the problem with this case—it seems like everybody’s got something to hide” she said after a moment’s thought. “I just don’t trust any of them!”

I had my doubts, too, but I didn’t buy Billie’s global conclusion. “Don’t you agree, in any investigation most people you interrogate tell the truth?”

“Yeah, I guess so. Actually, I do take most people at face value, but I think it’s hard for people to tell the truth when they feel threatened, not because they are guilty of any crime, but because telling the truth destroys perceptions they have of themselves.”

“All I can say, Billie, is after reading the interview, his account of what happened Sunday night pretty much agrees with what I learned yesterday from Em and his wife. I could check but I’m pretty sure his story about when he and his girlfriend left the island agrees with the printout from the gate computer. What happened later is something that may need checking out, but beyond that I can’t give you any more help on this one.”

“Charley, I’m way ahead of you!” Billie exclaimed. “I immediately took off for the swinging singles haven where that food service girlfriend of his hangs her apron. Luckily, I latched onto a nosy neighbor, probably the only person over fifty in the entire complex. According to her, Sunday night Cecelia and Red arrived together in separate vehicles around eight twenty or so. He parked in a vacant space reserved for a resident who is away, and this really ticked her off. The neighbor swore neither one left the unit that night and since she is a light sleeper she would have heard them if they had. She also stressed the walls were so thin she could hear everything that went on in their unit, and she did mean *everything!* Anyhow, she verified Cecelia left around seven the next morning. Red didn’t leave until a little after nine, and she was sure about that because that’s when her quilting show started. Put it all together,” Billie concluded, “and there’s nothing Nosey Nellie says that contradicts anything in Red’s sworn statement, so we both seem to agree on that.”

Visibly frustrated she turned over the page in her notebook, telling me she had struck out with Dave Williams, learning nothing new except that he admitted to a brief affair with the ebullient Ms. Trostle, and that he had no alibi after he left the clubhouse for home the night before the murder. Since it was uncertain when Gloria Myers would be returning, she had to accept the secondhand account of Phil's last day at face value. We finally concluded there was nothing our investigation had uncovered that cast any suspicion on our suspects' alibis and that Dr. Karyl's flight would certainly lead most everyone to conclude he was the culprit, with revenge the motive. It was a less than satisfying conclusion to our investigation, but we had run out of new ideas.

Resurrecting one of my worst one-liners ever I suggested we return to our respectable homes. Relieved that the case was finally winding down, I headed for Number Ten to tell Mel the good news. Hopefully the day wasn't too far off when I could go back to being a glorified rentacop once again.

CHAPTER 27—THE PARTY'S OVER

Thursday morning, with our suspect interviews out of the way, I was enjoying a sleep-in when the call came on the house phone that a sleepy Mel handed me.

"Charley! Hope I didn't wake you. I couldn't sleep a wink last night," announced a highly agitated Billie, steaming and clearly in the red zone. I briefly considered whether asking her to identify the original artist and the label on which the song was recorded would help calm her down, but wisely adopted my best conciliatory posture. "Billie. I thought things were looking up. Would it help

telling someone about it," I mumbled, straining to read the time on the bedside clock-radio: 6:51 and counting.

"Yeah. But not over the phone. As they say in the movies 'your place or mine?'" My answer was delayed briefly while I considered the cinematic possibilities for her comment, finally announcing, "Ours, and we can discuss it over the great breakfast Mel is going to fix us." This brought Mel bolt upright, rising like a Phoenix from under the covers, curiosity replaced by concern when I announced the menu. "You know, scrambled eggs, bacon, grits, biscuits with gravy, all those good things we Southerners stuff into our systems to elevate our cholesterol levels and shorten our life expectancy." Still not responding to the therapeutic effects of my topical humor, Billie hung up saying she was on her way.

Mel asked me what that was all about and I said Billie had her knickers in a knot and I was cast in the father confessor role. My snappy repartee again falling flat I dragged myself into the shower before I could inflict any more verbal damage. Given the early hour and the traffic, Billie was shortly ignoring the steaming cup of coffee placed in front of her, pushing the overflowing folder she carried across the table in my direction, immediately cutting to the chase. She looked tired, leaden rings under red-streaked eyes and complexion washed out, hair damp and stringy and out of uniform in a crumpled white blouse and shapeless slacks.

"Last night after tossing and turning for a couple of hours, the case still on my mind, I was finally dropping off a few minutes after two when I got a call from the night duty officer telling me they had located Dr. Karyl's truck in one of the commuter parking lots at the community college. I got there right away and treated the whole thing like a crime scene, including photographs of the truck as evidence of where it was parked. You've got them there. The vehicle was unlocked, the keys missing. From my preliminary examination I saw no evidence of foul play so I had the truck towed in for the technicians to give it a complete workup. I also interviewed the campus cops, including one Benny Jeter who

discovered the vehicle. He said he hadn't seen my bulletin until yesterday and this is a crowded commuter lot during the day and evening, clearing out only late at night. Unless we get a lucky break there's no way of determining when the vehicle was left there."

Directing my attention to the batch of illuminated nighttime photos that were more suggestive of a promotional brochure than a police investigation, the top one showed the shrubbery-framed entrance sign proudly proclaiming "Home of the Raiders," with a black and silver pirate logo. There were several of the parking lot around the vehicle, presumably looking for tracks, and a couple showing the tape surrounding the space occupied by the battered white van starkly illuminated by the nighttime flash photo. Tossing the memo aside and unsure how to react I turned to my own breakfast, Billie encouraging me to eat while she consulted her notes, saying she had a theory that fit the facts and locating Dr. Karyl's truck was the final proof she needed.

"Here's what I figured while I couldn't sleep," she said. "Sunday, the day before Daisy bought the farm, Dr. Karyl, as we knew him, left early in the morning to meet someone. Either that person was an accomplice helping him escape, which means he's probably gone for good, or it was someone who wanted Dr. Karyl out of the way. In any case, I figure he or someone else abandoned his truck Sunday night. This opens a lot of possibilities, including he's dead. But, this doesn't explain the car the nearsighted witness says went up the road to the computer guy's cabin late that afternoon, apparently leaving early the next morning a day before Drummond said the Bureau guys showed up and found the place cleaned out. Whoever drove that car most likely gathered up Dr. Karyl's personal belongings because they weren't found in his truck. Think now, 'dark colored, new looking sedan,' that's what the Bureau report said. Does that bring anything to mind?" she asked, looking at me intently, her countenance suggesting she had reached a significant conclusion.

“Agent Drummond!” I exclaimed excitedly. “If the car was one of theirs they still had to mention it because they knew we were also investigating. Or, maybe Drummond is playing a solo hand unknown to the other guys in the game. Plus, they really had a weak explanation when it came to the unidentified driver, the guy who stayed overnight at Dr. Karyl’s house, saying he might have been an accomplice. I’ve always wondered about Drummond and the Bureau’s interest in this case, way out of proportion to the loss of a few ounces of explosive nearly ten years ago, and referring at times to vague ‘national security concerns’ despite the fact that national security concerns are on the front burner of things the country cares about right now. And, it’s always puzzled me why they chose to take a lowly rentacop into their confidence. Perhaps they were interested in me not for the help I tried to give them but to keep track of what I was doing and make sure I wasn’t learning too much on my own. Initially they said they were just interested in the explosive. Then I put them on to Dr. Orwell, who invented the stuff, and they turn up Dr. Myers, a famous nuclear scientist with a top secret security clearance. Add to this the latest victim is a super smart young scientist who’s working in the same field, and what happens? The Bureau suddenly loses interest and along with everyone else seems content to let the whole thing die. But, there are too many loose ends. Put it together any way you like, but when you start talking about explosives and nukes I think you’re into some pretty heavy stuff!”

“I agree,” Billie said thoughtfully. “I really can’t add much because the Suits don’t confide much in us local yokels. But, what do we do now? My boss has pulled me off the case, and your FBI contact is suspect. Any ideas?”

I sat there—clueless! “Billie. I don’t know. At this point all we’ve got to fall back on is our wits. We’re badly overloaded with facts, rumors, suspects, victims and theories, a new one just this morning. But, I’m a guy who works best when I have time to think. Right now I’m suffering from a bad case of information overload. Tell you what: comes Monday morning I’m going to lock myself in the

office and review everything I've accumulated on this case. If it's really over I need to sort out the stuff anyway. And, if anything useful comes out of the exercise, trust me, you'll be the first one to know. I agree we've reached the point where mere gut feelings are outweighed by cold facts and maybe it's time to pull out and save ourselves grief and the taxpayers money. Our hands are now officially tied so any further direct investigation is definitely out. But like the song says 'they can't put you in jail for thinking' so let me give it a try."

"But, promise me, that's where you'll draw the line," she pleaded, eyes wide and locked on mine. "We are both already in so deep and we will be exceeding our authority to the point our jobs could be at stake. We could find ourselves in trouble with the law if we aren't careful, and I'm not ready yet to throw away my career in law enforcement, although I confess the thought has crossed my mind," she concluded, half-smiling as she spoke.

"Can I have a copy of this report and the photos?" I asked.

"No problem. Just take these, I made copies," she said handing them to me. "Keep me posted on what happens. Let's keep in touch, but first I'll take you guys up on the breakfast offer."

After Billie had wolfed down her meal we tried to keep things going with small talk but it was clear that she was having trouble keeping her eyes open, finally falling asleep on the couch. Mel covered her up with the sea shell afghan and we spent a quiet day, taking care not to disturb the exhausted officer. In late afternoon Mel mixed a batch of dry martinis, afterwards locating some snow crabs in the freezer that she turned

into a memorable, butter-splattered feast. It was clear the cumulative disasters had taken their toll, Billie and I working long hours and Mel frustrated by loss of the closeness we had enjoyed for so many years. After dinner, she kept the libations coming, all the while entertaining us with everything from tales of her childhood to cop stories from our former life. Many of them I

remembered dimly, some not at all. Around eleven with the party winding down we drank a final toast to crime and vowed to keep our friendship alive. Mel suggested Billie, her eyes again barely open, stay over rather than risk the drive inland, an offer she happily accepted.

Keyed up as I was I made no move to follow the women upstairs to bed. Tilting back the recliner and for the first time in quite a while no longer hearing the soft patter of raindrops against the glass sliding doors I soon fell into a sound and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER 28—TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

Sleeping in late to disperse the effects of our previous night's celebration of the case winding down, I awoke to light rain and gusting wind, then going the couch potato route and dropping off again in late afternoon while listening to the Rays early on scratch out four runs with the help of two Blue Jay errors. That night after some early rain, we woke to a mostly cloudy day, me hitting the couch again to watch the 2-1 Dolphins' hopes dashed as Kurt Warner led the way with four TD passes for the St. Louis Rams in a decisive 42-10 victory in their home opener delayed by the national tragedy. Happy to have seen the last of September, 2001, a month we would always remember, Monday morning I was awakened by the glare from the early morning sun reflecting off the deck, something we hadn't seen for far too long. Arriving at the office a little after nine, I found a stack of messages impaled on the spike on my desk, many of them marked "Urgent." With all we had been through their importance had diminished considerably, the majority of them ending up in my wastebasket. Following up on one from Dave Williams he told me he had been given permission by the sheriff to reopen the back nine, which turned out to be a mixed blessing. The clear skies had brought out a horde of golfers seeking tee times, but while the rain clouds had disappeared the course had yet to dry out

to the point that even with the ninety-degree rule the fairways were taking a real beating. With the bridge out at the slough golfers on the back nine were now forced to walk down the edge of the thirteenth fairway directly toward the golfers teeing off, not only threatening life and limb, but also slowing play all the way back to the first tee. As a consequence Dave was not only kept busy by those asking when the damage would be repaired, but even more time was spent with those asking how to adjust their handicaps accordingly when the official rules of golf were less than helpful in providing an answer. Before I could devote my full attention to such weighty matters, Mona buzzed in with the news that Billie had called and Agent Drummond was on his way to a meeting in her office at which he wanted me to be present. Instinctively I reached for my slicker, only to realize I didn't need it any more. Using the siren, I made my way into town, to find out that Drummond had arrived a short time earlier..

Clutching the requisite cup of coffee I found them settling down with yet another cop staple, sugar and crème donuts. Billie was decked out in her best uniform which she kept in the closet, while the federal agent was favoring the trademark dark suit, still with the green and gold striped tie his only fashion statement. Mumbling an apology for being late, I took the other visitor's chair while he fumbled with the locks on his briefcase. Extracting a bulging bright green file folder he consulted it from time to time as he spoke.

"My guys as you know have been in the area since Tuesday, hoping to wind things up and get home this afternoon. Got some real news for you. They don't call me 'Bulldog' for nothing. First, the biggie. Remember the crazy computer guy who bugged out? Well, in a shed behind his house we found traces of the explosive used in the golf course murders. But that wasn't all. Ran a check of fingerprints he left behind. It turns out Dr. Karyl wasn't Dr. Karyl at all. Seems he was actually one Bernard Glass. Maybe?" he added uncertainly.

“Hold it right there!” I exclaimed. “Karyl isn’t Karyl and maybe Glass isn’t Glass. No maybe about it, I’m confused.”

“Me, too! Whoever he is, it seems his specialty is taking over other people’s identities, possibly after disposing of their bodies. Anyhow, there was a real Bernie Glass. He was a computer whiz but his wife cleaned his clock in a divorce and then he drifted from one college teaching job to another. In the summer of 1985 at age forty-two when he’d been fired by an upstate New York university, he piled his stuff into an old pickup truck and headed for sunny southern California. A month or so later someone claiming to be Glass showed up at the Yuma Proving Ground, applying for a relatively low-level job as a computer specialist. Since neither man’s fingerprints were on file anywhere, after a background investigation the guy claiming to be Glass was given a security clearance and hired. Here’s the real clincher. No one made the connection at the time, but in 1995 a class ring and dental charts led to the positive identification of a body buried several years in the Arizona desert as Bernie Glass. The fact that Karyl had possession of the explosive links him to the weapons testing facility. It isn’t conclusive proof but it’s like ninety-nine percent certain he assumed Glass’s identity.”

“And, no one was ever the wiser?” I asked.

“Not at the time. Remember no one in Arizona knew the real Glass whose distinguishing facial characteristic was a bushy black beard, just like the impostor. Glass, nee Karyl, worked just hard enough so he wasn’t fired but eventually questions arose concerning his honesty. He was one of several people suspected of stealing computer equipment and supplies but things really heated up when a routine inventory found the catalogued sample of Dr. Orwell’s original explosive missing from a concrete storage bunker visible from his office window. To make a long story short, a witness was found who recalled seeing Glass enter the bunker. His story that he had meant to leave a note telling those involved to be more security conscious was so thin he was fired on the spot. However, shortly

thereafter Glass was identified as having been recruited by a foreign spying network although it wasn't clear whether he stole any military secrets. This was in the summer of 1993, a few weeks before the so-called Dr. Karyl showed up in Altima county." Looking up he paused and asked directly. "Do you get the picture?"

"In other words, the original Dr. Karyl, whoever he was, did away with the real Glass and then took over his identity. When they caught him with his fingers in the cookie jar he bugged out and decided to hide out in the backwoods of Florida. But, why did he reassume his old identity? Why didn't he just establish a new one?" I had wondered the same thing, and I was glad Billie had asked the question.

"Remember, they'd never really pinned anything on the original Karyl and his fingerprints weren't on file. His on-the spot termination as Glass coupled with his yet undiscovered involvement in spying meant he had to act quickly. You just can't become another person overnight. However he's had plenty of time to plan ahead in case his past history ever caught up with him, and because of this it will take a lucky break to catch him now—my guess is he's gone for good. Someone on the run can fade into the woodwork in a million ways, and it helps if he's had prior experience. Even though we screened the guy's bank records and didn't find any large and unexplained deposits as evidence of criminal activity, I wouldn't be surprised if he had a little something set aside for a rainy day. So if he didn't sell the stuff it's not unreasonable to assume he used it for his own purposes, like getting even with the people on the island who gave him the cold shoulder. Checking with a contact in PETA we found the guy's commitment to violence got him expelled from that group, so that alone makes him a viable suspect. On Monday morning he cleaned out his bank account, four hundred and two dollars, and that's when he took off and that's where the trail ends, at least for us," he concluded wistfully, one of the few times I had ever seen him display any emotion.

“But, what about the mysterious unidentified guy in the dark colored sedan who stayed at Karyl’s Monday night?” I asked, in the back of my mind Billie’s theory that somehow the Bureau might in fact be involved more than they were willing to let on. Looking over at her without being obvious she gave me a thumb’s up while he paused just a little too long before answering.

“That’s a loose end we haven’t yet tied up. We showed the neighbor photos of Mr. Jones, Red, the golf pro, Dr. Myers, Orwell, even one of you, Charley. Couldn’t ID anybody. Contrary to what we believe, there’s still a chance he’s the perp rather than an accomplice. Who knows?”

As the little man started to reassemble the papers in his briefcase I knew he was preparing for one of his hasty departures.

“Any suggestions as to what we might do now?” I asked, still concerned about the Bureau pulling out from the case.

“There’s not much you can do. The elusive Dr. Karyl is the only real link back to the murders. Law enforcement agencies throughout the country have been told to be on the lookout for him but by now the trail is getting cold. Plus, he’s pretty good at the changing identity thing and who knows where and as who he will surface next. That’s our problem. We’re still interested in the guy because of his involvement in your murders, and any possible link to international terrorism, but that’s starting to emerge as less and less likely. In that vein I don’t expect much to happen in the near future,” he said closing the clasps of his briefcase. “Like the song says, it’s time to say goodbye.’”

It was the most human thing I had ever heard him say and the reference to the song title told me he might be my type of guy after all.. I watched quietly as with a half wave he turned and almost apologetically closed the door behind him. Even though I felt he was not always forthcoming in what he chose to share with me, he had always treated me as a fellow professional, for which I respected him.

Looking over at Billie I could see she was as emotionally drained as I was. Following her out the door I made my departure, grabbing the last of the sugar donuts to sustain me on the trip back to my office. While half-heartedly tackling the paperwork that had stacked up even higher in my absence, it occurred to me that while we had learned more than we had needed to know about Patricia Holifield we still knew nothing about her whereabouts around the time of the murder. This gave me an excuse to head out for the day, starting with lunch at home where I learned from the Sheriff on the *News at Noon* that law enforcement agencies in twelve states were on the lookout for a material witness wanted in the investigation. Until he was found there would be no further official statements. He also mentioned additional criminal acts were not anticipated and that he was suspending the activities of the task force. A new Botox blonde had introduced herself as Darby's replacement, saying she wished her well. I wished her well, too, hopefully out of my life forever.

Hoping to update my file on Trish I took off for the conference center where I was told that she had just returned from vacation and wouldn't be at work until the following day. Arriving at her golf course condo I leaned on the bell for quite some time before she finally came to the door, looking nothing like the femme fatale I remembered from our initial meeting. She explained that she spent the previous night on a red-eye returning from a week-long Alaskan cruise out of Seattle on the newly commissioned *Star Princess*. Now effectively eliminated as a suspect, I offered her the somewhat weak explanation that we were routinely interviewing everyone who could even remotely help us with the investigation. She gave me an odd look, probably wondering if I was hitting on her. It didn't help any when I accepted her offer of a scotch and water because she was out of beer.

The conversation never really got around to the murders, and as the shadows from the afternoon sun lengthened another two scotches helped her recount her life story, largely reprising on what I had learned from my inquiry, which I couldn't acknowledge. She spoke

of the doctor and his wife as her parents, admitting her home life with them was less than ideal. She filled in the time-line after the beach, spent mainly as a cart girl at a posh country club in the Daytona area where she apparently didn't achieve her goal of nabbing a rich husband. She also told several long, rambling golf stories saying she had a seven handicap, and we should play a round together sometime. Increasingly worried by the lateness of the hour, turning down a third scotch while she fixed herself a fourth, I was working my way toward the door when she grabbed my elbow and got in my face, close and personal, with her closing remarks.

"Before you leave, Charley," she started, her speech slightly slurred, "there's something I have to tell you. I know you've heard stuff about me and Em. You must realize, Em has more than one woman in his life, and his relationships with them are not always obvious. That's especially true for me, but if you assume that sex is part of it, I can only say that Em is a businessman, first and foremost. This island and what his father did are the driving forces in his life. Nothing else matters. In all of this, let's just say I am a confidant, a sounding board if you will, along with that real estate bitch who works the front gate, and I use the term advisedly. Let me leave you with a little, teeney, weeney bit of advice," she said, the booze talking. "Don't be a damn fool. Stay as far away from her as possible. She's bad, bad news, just remember where you heard it."

Holding open the door it was obvious our suddenly steamy session was over. The attack on Elf that came from out in left field puzzled me. Could it be that both women were in a contest for Em the Second's affections? Taking undue care driving the short distance home I was concerned exactly how would I explain the afternoon's events to Mel.

I shouldn't have worried, because when the front door opened I was greeted by stormy silence.

CHAPTER 32—BEGINNING OF THE END

The following morning at the office Mona was reading *People Today* and the deputy was playing solitaire on the computer telling me things were relatively quiet.

Sitting at my desk I was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness. For the past three weeks I had been on an emotional high, overwhelmed by the present and uncertain about the future. Now the rug had been pulled out from under me. I knew I would miss Sgt. Greene for her sincerity and support, and despite my misgivings, Agent Drummond for the give and take we had enjoyed together. But, despite his prepossessing appearance there was something about him that served to keep you in line, like your elementary school teacher. Still staring at the phone and nagged by the piles of paper on my desk, I buzzed for my administrative assistant to help me with the final task: closing the case in anticipation of things returning to normal.

Mona, clearly curious, settled back in the visitor's chair. In my best, most reassuring manner, I began, "I owe you an apology. We started out as colleagues, but along the way I've had to keep a lot to myself, and while I'm sure you've picked up bits and pieces you are probably pretty confused at this point." From the expression on her face I knew I was right on target, so I decided to press the advantage. "I wish I could have kept you informed, but I couldn't. Now that it's time to wrap things up, I hope to make it up to you. While we put all this paperwork together into a single file I'll try to clue you in on everything to date, knowing you can be trusted. Do you have any problem with that?" Looking up and seeing the expression on her face as she shook her head I knew no answer was necessary.

For lack of a better starting point, for more than two hours we tried as best we could to put everything in chronological order, stacking up piles of paper on the rug, sorted out and labeled with post-it notes. But, the further we went the more confused we became and the higher the stack of things that just didn't fit. Embarrassed I turned to Mona, observing sheepishly, "I'm afraid we're only making things worse. We've lost our momentum and we're just going around in circles. Can you think of any better way to make sense out of this mess?"

“Well, I know what Mr. Waite would do,” she replied, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

“Mr. Waite?”

“He was my investigative procedures instructor, the very best. Let me show you how he’d handle the situation,” she said, already on her way to the storage room. She soon returned with a package of colorful Magic Markers and the easel that she set up in front of the far wall. On this she positioned an oversized pad of poster paper, turning to the first blank sheet.

“We were told to classify information using a color code. Green is for verified information, facts if you like; yellow: unverified, ambiguous or hearsay information; red: misleading statements or outright lies; and, black: conclusions about motive, means and opportunity. Do you have any problem with that?”

“None at all,” I replied, once again impressed with my colleague’s organizational talents.

For the next three hours Mona filled page after page, using Sgt. Greene’s notes on victims and suspects to cross-classify the information. Finally, she turned over a clean white sheet and asked directly, “OK. That’s it. You don’t have anything more to add after the last stuff you got from Billie and the last conversation you had with agent Drummond. Right?”

“Correct. Where do we go from here?” I asked.

“Mr. Waite taught us that any investigation must take account of its place in the law enforcement process. Starting with information from the investigation one has to develop evidence in support of a theory fixing responsibility for a criminal act. The suspect is then arrested, charged and prosecuted in a court of law, to be found guilty or innocent. The process is far from perfect, and it can break down at any point, but it all rests on the quality of the investigation.”

“What about the quality of *this* investigation?” I asked. “We’ve had multiple uncoordinated jurisdictions, working all sorts of angles, and not necessarily reaching the same conclusions.”

“You’ve hit the nail on the head, Boss. This gives us several choices,” she said, stepping up to the easel. “First, we can accept the position of Sheriff Perkins and the FBI—Dr. Karyl’s flight fixes guilt, and we close the case. Second, we can actively search for Dr. Karyl, or at least for a trail leading to him. This is something we’re not really in a position to do; probably not even allowed to do. Third, we can assume there is some other explanation, given the facts. This suggests that another person, or persons, is responsible for the crime. In any event whether we can anticipate yet another incident depends on whether the killer has been frightened off, with our only alternative being to wait and see if disaster strikes again and maybe get a break of some sort.”

“I see your reasoning. Now, the big one: which course of action do you personally support, and why?”

Stepping back from the easel, Mona stared thoughtfully at the last page for quite some time. “I’m getting an idea, but to be sure I need to make two phone calls. Don’t worry, I’m not going to reveal anything confidential or do anything to compromise the investigation. One is to ask a question to someone here on the island, and the other is to an old friend. Any objections?”

Having none, I waited an anxious half hour until Mona returned, clutching a yellow legal pad that she studied intently before reporting on what she had learned.

“I was pretty sure what I’d find, but it confirmed my suspicions. First I called my old buddy at the community college, Benny Jeter. I worked in campus security when I was going to school, and I asked him to check with the campus motor pool to see if any of their vehicles were unaccounted for. That’s what took me so long. Anyhow he called back and said the college president’s car was out, but he hadn’t used it for several days. It seems likely it’s been

stolen. This didn't surprise me one bit as they run a really loose ship in the motor pool. In fact, the cops told them this would happen if they kept leaving keys in the ignition. It's going to be hard to trace the stolen vehicle because it's identified only by silver numerals on the bumper, easily peeled off. That's the point at which for me suddenly all the pieces came together. I am confident I know who is responsible for these crimes. The problem is, I don't have one shred of evidence that would hold up in a court of law."

"That's all well and good, but put me out of my misery. Whodunit?"

Settling back in her chair she paused a long time before speaking. And, then she *told me!* I sat there dumfounded! Her explanation fit the facts, and after unsuccessfully trying to punch holes in her theories I was convinced she was right. Everything she said made sense, the pieces indeed all fit together. But, when it came to proof, I was even more skeptical.

"Mona, I'm with you all the way. That's what happened! But, providing proof that would stand up in court is a totally different matter. I don't see any solution to that problem, and eventually the case will go cold."

"That could happen…unless…."

"Unless what?" I asked.

"I've thought of something that might work, but it's terribly, terribly risky. That was the reason for my second phone call. It all depends on a single person, and he would be in more trouble than any of us if it failed. I told him exactly what was involved and the risks he would face, and he said he would think about it, and he would call me back. You might ask, why would someone put their own reputation on the line to help us out? First of all, he's a decent guy who doesn't want to see someone get away with murder. But, if he does agree to go along with us it will be for a far more

personal reason, and that's because of the way you have treated him. He would do it as a favor to you if for no other reason."

Mona paused for quite some time and I didn't interrupt. I could see that she was distinctly uneasy about the direction things were going, and that she was uncertain about how I might react. This was confirmed by her next few words.

"Boss, I'm going to have to get personal, and I hope you won't take it the wrong way. You know, because of some of the things you say and the way you act sometimes, it's easy to conclude that you don't care about people, especially when you make fun of the way they act. But, anyone who knows you also knows that's not true. Underneath you are a decent, kind person who has worked hard all his life and who respects everyone, not just the rich or those with authority, but especially the little people that do the work and get their hands dirty. You don't realize how quickly you are making friends with the people who work in maintenance and the restaurants, or the offices or take out the trash. Now it turns out that the only person with a chance of bringing down a cold-hearted killer is someone you befriended, someone whose life you have affected and who respects you, even though you may not realize it. My gut feeling is he's not going to let us down. You know what they say—what goes around comes around."

I sat there dumfounded. What troubled me most was I wasn't sure what she suggested would provide the solid proof we needed. And, if it didn't: Bye! Bye! Charley. But, frustrated and unable to come up with a better idea, I had to admit it was worth a shot. Making up my mind, I told her "OK. If your mystery man wants to come on board let me know immediately. Then, we'll decide what to do. Does that make any sense?"

Before she could answer the day man buzzed in with a phone call, for her.

Keeping my fingers crossed I handed her the receiver, relieved when after a couple of minutes a smile crossed her face and she

gave me the thumb’s up sign.

Nothing anticipated turns out exactly as envisioned, but I finally saw a way that we might be able to unmask a killer and close the case. That failing, the consequences were predictably so bad I dared not even give it a thought. But, I had made my choice and there was no way of turning back!

CHAPTER 33—THE TRAP IS SET

After the first few phone calls Mona reported the earliest she could get the group together was eight the following evening. The extra preparation time was welcome, although the anxiety over what might happen was nigh on unbearable. It took Mona through lunchtime the next day to finish her preparations while I nervously tried to figure out what I was going to say. We spent the afternoon in Mr. Jones private dining room, adding extra chairs to accommodate the group, with individual name cards to designate where each person sat.

Mona had skillfully transferred the exhibits to overhead transparencies, better suited to a corporate briefing than an attempt to flush a vicious killer into the open. I hoped they were up to the job. We started rehearsing my presentation with the light from the overhead projector and the wall sconces to heighten the dramatic

impact. In whole or in part I stumbled my way through several times, doing it virtually by memory until we obtained a small, shielded light for the podium. This distinctly improved my performance. Finally, time running out, we had two steaks sent in from the Grill, finishing our meal only minutes before the first visitor arrived.

I had placed the podium at the far end of the table, the overhead exhibits to be projected on a large screen behind me. Shortly before eight people started arriving, each time the door opened those already there twisting around in their seats to scrutinize the newcomers. Mona directed them to assigned seats at the opposite end of the table and behind them in two rows of chairs at the rear of the room where the door was located. Seated at the table up front were Sgt. Greene, Sheriff Perkins, and Agent Drummond. In the first row, behind them, were Sylvia Jones, Cecelia Wentworth, Patricia Holifield and Tara Trostle. Bringing up the rear were Stanley Trostle, Dave Williams, Emlyn Jones, Red Jones and Dr. Onslow Orwell. Mona was seated to my right, ready to operate the overhead projector.

The Trostles finally arrived, five minutes late. As they silently took their seats I rose somewhat unsteadily and tried to settle down as I briefly consulted my notes. Then, looking around the room I tried to engage everyone with direct eye contact. “I want to thank you for coming tonight, knowing only the meeting was called by Sheriff Perkins. Sheriff, would you kindly stand up with one of your officers, Sergeant Billie Greene, for the people who may not know you.” Purposely passing over Agent Drummond, Mona was last. “Let me now introduce my associate, Ms. Mona Wisdom, who deserves full credit for everything I am going to say. Without her sharp mind and hard work we wouldn’t be here to put an end to the crimes that have so devastated our island community.” Hearing a distinct gasp from the semi-darkness I didn’t have to look up to know it was the emotional Tara Trostle, and I felt the adrenaline kick in as I confidently proceeded to the substantive part of my presentation.

“What I plan first is to examine the motivation for these crimes based on assumptions made about possible victims and likely suspects. At times it’s going to sound like I’m making specific accusations. I’m not. It’s mere speculation. I’m really concerned with ….”

Mona projected the first exhibit on the large screen positioned behind the podium:

MOTIVES MEANS OPPORTUNITY

“Motives in most crimes are obvious—not in this case. Investigations by the sheriff’s department and the FBI failed to find a specific motive for the golf course attacks. But I am indebted to my partner Sgt. Billie Green for pointing out just because the victims were non-specific targets doesn’t mean these were crimes without a motive. It is when we come to the second crime that we have to take seriously the question of whether in fact both were specific, focused attacks, with a definite purpose. Keeping this in mind, let us focus on eleven people, each motivated in some way to plan and execute the crimes, and to benefit from the confusion they would predictably create. Those lacking any direct motive should be looked on as accomplices rather than as the primary perpetrator. Let’s look briefly at motives and possible alliances to act on those motives. I apologize for bringing island gossip into this. Even though it may come as news to some of you, it’s gossip, that’s all it is, not necessarily true but relevant to the investigation. Finally, please keep in mind, if you are innocent some of this may not make any sense; you may even think it is unnecessary or be offended. I apologize, as it is all necessary even though I am talking to only one person, the murderer and perpetrator of all these horrific crimes.

“Emlyn Jones appears first on the list. Rumors, and I stress nothing but rumors, have hinted at some sort of relationship between Mr. Jones and Ms. Holifield, to the point that a divorce from his present wife might be in the making. Motive: Do away with Sylvia Jones and avoid the expense of a costly and messy divorce. But there is a

major problem with this theory. Let's assume, first, that Mr. Jones set up the first accident to give the appearance of randomness, and then planned a devilishly skillful misdirect to throw us off the scent when it came to the final crime. Originally, after booby-trapping cart 61 he then allowed it to be assigned to him and Sylvia for the couples blitz. Then at the last minute he announces he won't be playing and asks Dave Williams to take his place, knowing this is an offer the golf pro can't refuse. What a brilliant plan! Now he can eliminate both his wife and her rumored lover in a single swoop! But there's only one thing wrong with this theory: he would not later have assigned another cart to the nine a.m. tee time and then scheduled the lethal cart to go out for the afternoon's exhibition match in which he was involved! So we enter YES under motive, and YES under opportunity, but a resounding NO under means, I'll explain that later. Forget about availability of the explosive and access to the golf cart, from the standpoint of means the crime as executed makes no sense and Mr. Jones is ruled out as a possible perpetrator, as he well should be. I apologize for bringing up gossip and unfounded rumor but I am merely following through on my boss asking for a complete, impartial and exhaustive investigation designed to being the true perpetrator to justice. Please keep this in mind as I proceed.

"Let's pass on to Red Jones. Under motive YES, only if you assume that both Emlyn and his wife Sylvia are the intended victims, and that Red wanted to inherit in the event of their deaths. Under means, the explosive was apparently available, and he had access to the golf carts, again a YES. Let's further assume Red booby-trapped the golf cart in anticipation of his brother and his wife using it Tuesday morning. Then, Emlyn announces at dinner that he's not playing and Dave will be taking his place. Granted, Red could have left things as they were with the likely result that Sylvia would be a victim, and Dave collateral damage. But, this still leaves Emlyn between him and the Paradise Development millions, forcing him to commit yet another crime to accomplish his original objective—another crime that would depart from the established pattern of randomness and strongly point to him as the

perpetrator. And here's where opportunity is critical. The deadly cart is locked up in the cart shed to which Red doesn't have the key, but he has to somehow stop it from going out. Changing the cart assignment on the cart roster is logically an alternative he could have chosen, but did he have the opportunity to do so? Everyone agrees Red didn't leave the restaurant that night until he was logged out at the gate with an independent witness testifying that he didn't leave his girlfriend's apartment until the following morning, after the lethal explosion took place. Like his brother, it is possible to carry the case for Red only so far on the basis of logic and we enter NO under opportunity and look elsewhere for a viable perpetrator.

"Cecelia Wentworth is next on the list but only as a possible accomplice to Red Jones. Given the timing of events her alibi is virtually identical to Red's. Eliminate him, and she's eliminated, too.

"Then comes Sylvia Jones. Sylvia's motive also stems from her husband's rumored romantic entanglement with Trish Holifield, and the possibility of a divorce, again mere speculation. A divorce costs her, too, but in a different way. She loses her social position and all the advantages of being Mr. Jones' wife. But, here's where the possibility of alliances has to be considered because without an accomplice, especially when it came to changing the cart schedule, she had no opportunity Assuming, again based on rumor, that Mrs. Jones and Dave Williams were more than casual friends, we are forced to ask, would Mr. Williams assign the booby-trapped cart at nine a.m. so it would be used by both Emlyn Jones, the intended victim, and his wife? How could Mr. Williams hope to benefit from Mrs. Jones inheriting her husband's estate if she perished along with him? Furthermore, reassigning a safe cart for number 61 because Mr. Jones backed out of playing makes no sense. All the pro had to do was to return later, use his key to enter the cart shed and remove the explosive,

so, there was no use going through all that rigmarole reassigning the golf cart. Scratch Mr. Williams and Sylvia Jones also because she has an alibi for the critical time period, again with my apologies in the first place."

Throat dry from my long, uninterrupted presentation, I paused to pour a glass of water from the carafe near the lectern. Breathing a sigh of relief at having passed over the Jones' family without incident, I quickly proceeded to the next name on my list.

"Komputer Karyl, we have to include him even though he is long gone. Motive? Revenge. Means? He has the explosive. Opportunity? NO, for two reasons. First, the island's gate was manned by sheriff's deputies for three days prior to the murder. How did he get in? Could he have crossed the causeway on foot the night before the murder or otherwise visited the island by sea? It is unlikely and virtually impossible he could have got in and out what with the coast patrolled by a boat from the sheriff's department and maybe by other jurisdictions in response to the national emergency. Plus, how did he learn of the need to change the cart roster? Possibly, as an accomplice, but then how did he get into the pro shop? He once had a key, years ago, but the lock was changed last year. To clarify Karyl's involvement in the case here's where the FBI investigation, of which most of you are unaware, is of critical importance. A neighbor reported Dr. Karyl left home Sunday night, never to return. And the same neighbor reported an unidentified man in a dark colored sedan arrived at Dr. Karyl's late Monday evening and left the following morning. She swore it wasn't Dr. Karyl and she was pretty sure it wasn't anyone directly connected with the case when shown photos. So we either have a joker in the deck or the neighbor was wrong in her identification. Ask yourself: how would an aged woman with failing eyesight identify Dr. Karyl? By his bushy black beard! But, given his intent to flee the following day, what is the first thing he would do? Simple. Shave it off! So the unidentified accomplice Dr. Karyl needed to make Dr. Karyl a viable suspect turns out to be Dr. Karyl himself, and the dark colored sedan he drove was none other than a car stolen from

the college, which Mona reminded me projected the school colors. Knowing where Dr. Karyl was Sunday night eliminates him as the perpetrator, although he is still the strongest suspect when it comes to supplying the explosive and being an accomplice.

“Things start moving quickly now,” I promised. “Dr. Orwell. When it comes to opportunity, we have a problem. We have verified that Monday Dr. Orwell attended a day-long conference in Gainesville, was in fact a panelist in late afternoon. Therefore, he had no opportunity to booby-trap the victim’s golf cart. He arrived home well after Dave and the cart guy left and there were only two keys to the shed’s padlock, plus there was no way he could have learned about Mr. Jones’ change of plan. So Dr. Orwell is eliminated.

“Next is Dr. Myers and his wife. I’d have to apologize to his loving wife, Gloria, if she were here but we have to include him to clear his name. The victim in this case we assume was the person actually killed, Ms. Shen, who was his house guest. Not to speak ill of the dead, I nevertheless have to eliminate all possibilities. So I have to include him as a suspect, although I won’t go into the reasons why. Simply stated, Dr. Myers had to have known that his victim was going to be his house guest before September 10, the date of the first murder, so he couldn’t have juiced up the exploding golf club.

“Now let’s turn to the Trostles. Motive? Being mentioned in Mr. Wilson’s will his death would materially help their family bank account. Means? Sure, get the stuff from Dr. Karyl. But again, there’s a problem. Gator Wilson didn’t plan his trip to the U.S. until September 16 when he got invited to play at Sawgrass, again after the first murder. The problem again is timing. The Trostles’ motive is inconsistent with any opportunity to have planned the first crime.”

Pausing to consider the last name on my list, again I poured myself a glass of water, not because I was thirsty but because I needed time to think. This was when timing was critical. What happened in the next two minutes or so would determine whether I would be

able to unmask a cunning killer, or be out of a job and disgraced beyond belief.

Having effectively eliminated all suspects except the last one, Mona projected the final overhead, a simple blowup of the last entry on the list:

UNKNOWN ???

I paused for a while to heighten the impact. “Now you’ve reached the end of my investigation. We have run out of suspects, an unknown killer emerges as the only possibility. But, my administrative assistant Ms. Wisdom saw something no one else did and it completely changes the way one interprets the facts. I see she has beeped our guest and he has just entered. Sir, please come forward and join us.”

Heads turned and people whispered to each other as the visitor strode out of the gloom. Fred, sometime bellman and waiter, took his place beside me at the podium. On the screen behind us Mona projected a copy of the architect’s drawing for the second floor of the clubhouse. I continued my presentation with a question, “Fred, tell us, what are your jobs at Paradise Cay?”

“I work as a bellman at the conference center and also as a waiter in both the Grill and Highlands restaurants when needed,” he said, more composed that I would have imagined.

“And, were you working in the Grill last Sunday evening, the twenty-third?”

Before he could answer I was aware of the door at the rear closing quietly and I observed Sgt. Greene pointing to the exit. I didn’t have to take roll call to know who was missing. After Sgt. Greene and her boss had joined me for a whispered conference, Sheriff Perkins, ramrod straight and with a no-nonsense expression on his face, announced in a loud command voice, “No one is to leave this room until further notice. Also, I must ask you to refrain from

talking among yourselves.” If he said anything else, Billie and I didn’t hear it because we were already out the door.

The fish had taken the bait! Now our job was to reel it in!

CHAPTER 34—TOP OF THE STAIRS

“You were really cool, I couldn’t have done it,” Billie said as we ran down the stairs and into the parking lot, lightning bouncing off the clouds. She had grabbed a spotlight on the way out and shining it around, she finally noted, “There’s his vehicle, he’s on foot, but there’s no way he can escape because I’ve got backup on the front gate and the island is sealed up tight. Where do you think he’s headed?” she asked directly.

“You’ll see, if I’m guessing right it’s not far,” I said as running across the village green we headed for the observation tower, floodlights highlighting the landscaping at its base. Looking up, a brilliant lightning flash gave us a fleeting glimpse of a shadowy figure at the rail of the dimly-lit viewing area at the top, the whole scene reprised in reverse colors in a slowly departing afterimage. We pulled up short, out of breath, close to the structure and invisible to anyone on the observation deck directly overhead.

We discussed what to do next. Billie suggested calling in backup to storm the tower and force the murderer to surrender. I pointed out this might expose them to deadly fire from above if the perpetrator were armed—a remote possibility, but something to consider. I felt the best approach would be to try to reason with the killer, who just might give up without a struggle. Seeing the powerful spotlight in Billie’s hand, shades of *Rear Window*, taking it from her I had a half-formed plan in my head. Telling Billie to cover me with her weapon, I reached the door to the staircase, a black and white enameled sign telling me the facility closed at six p.m. It was unlocked. Knowing my six foot two frame made an inviting target,

I looked up, the shiny white pinpoint lights on the risers creating a fairyland staircase reminiscent of the Magic Kingdom, leading up into an ugliness I knew was all too real.

Receiving no challenge from the top, I proceeded slowly and silently, the only sound my labored breathing, until halfway up I heard footsteps and a familiar voice call out “Don’t come any closer! Stop right there!” In the ensuing silence I considered a number of alternatives but decided to stick to my original plan of trying to talk the killer down. “You have nothing to fear. You can see, I’m unarmed,” I said, putting down the spotlight and extending my arms out to either side, dimly illuminated by light from the stairs. “I will personally guarantee your safety. I don’t hold you blameless for all you’ve done, but looking at it from your perspective I understand how you felt. There has to be a way of getting you help. I’m coming up. I want to talk to you,” I said unconvincingly, continuing up the stairs a step at a time and wondering what a professional negotiator might do in such a situation.

Receiving no reply from above, I eased my way up the last few steps to where my head would be exposed and I would be most vulnerable. Doubled over, I navigated two steps more and took a quick look, my eyes barely above floor level. To my tremendous relief the observation room was empty, meaning the suspect was on the walkway outside. Crawling on my hands and knees in the direction of the Dutch door, the top half open, I positioned myself to one side and called out, “I’m here to help. Don’t do anything rash. Believe me. I understand. Please talk to me. Tell me what I can do. Anything....”

His reply was barely audible. “You can go away and leave me alone. I’m beyond help. My life is nearing its end and I want to spend the last few minutes with my thoughts. I’m sorry innocent people got hurt. In setting up the first accident, I never meant to kill anyone, let alone that poor little guy attending the conference. But,

I used too much explosive and it was just my luck someone over seventy was given that particular bag."

"And, I assume you later duplicated the lethal dose when it came to the second murder because you were sure your plan would succeed? Am I right?" I added, trying to keep him talking knowing that Billie was sending for backup as we spoke.

"That's true, but I never thought that poor Chinese woman would die. I wanted to give the appearance it was merely another attack with the victim chosen randomly. When I saw my chance I took it. But, there was a weak link in my plan, call it a calculated risk, and it cost me. My hat's off to you. You were smart enough to figure it out."

"Not me," I replied. "It was Mona. She outsmarted me, the sheriff's department, and the FBI all put together."

"Whatever. But, this thing has gone too far, for too long. I'm not going to jail. I couldn't survive there. And, what's done can't be undone...." he said ruefully, the sound of his voice trailing off into the distant thunder.

"I wish there was some simple way to turn back the clock," I said sympathetically. "But, you can't erase the past. You're sick, I'm convinced of that, but even though I'm a professional cop who's not into profiling I still sense there must be some twisted reality that led you to commit your crimes. There's time for you to get help, doctors, psychiatrists, it's not too late. You have to take that on faith. You can trust me...let me help."

Slowly the murderer turned around to face me. In the dim light I thought I detected his features softening, a faint hope stirring inside me that we were on the same wavelength. Instinctively I moved backward, not knowing what he intended to do. I'm still not quite sure what happened next, but it started when my foot accidentally pushed the spotlight over the edge and it fell down the stairwell to explode with a crash on the landing below. Startled by the sound,

the killer fell back against the outer railing, which gave way slowly, first with a creaking sound and then a splintering crash. My own fear of heights kept me rooted to the spot, and from below I heard the distinct sound of his body hitting the ground with a sickening thud.

Billie's yell as she charged up the last few steps finally brought me back to the real world. "Charley, are you alright? Answer me! Are you okay?" "Yeah," I said with all the energy I could muster at the moment. Billie helped me make my way shakily down the stairs, somewhat dazed but greatly relieved when I finally reached solid ground. Then she grabbed both my arms and shook me as hard as she could. "Snap out of it, Charley! I was on my way up and heard it all. You did everything you could to save him. If he chose to jump, it was his decision. It wasn't anything you did. You've got to believe me!" she pleaded.

I made my way outside, unable to tell her if I had been better trained and less careless perhaps things would have worked out differently. I thought at the very end I had reached him and that he intended to give himself up. The railing was probably weakened by years of exposure to the salt air—an accident waiting to happen. But who would believe it? How could I deny when all was said and done that his death wasn't my fault? That's a cross I would have to bear.

Slowly I approached the spot where the unnaturally positioned figure lay sprawled face first on the ground, the deep shadows and the floodlights giving the whole scene the stark contrasts of a black and white horror film. Kneeling down I gently turned him over, to look on the distorted features of my friend—*Red Jones!*

CHAPTER 35—SECRETS AND LIES

After waiting for backup to secure the area around the tower, Billie called Sheriff Perkins and updated him on what had happened, suggesting the he share the news with Mr. Jones. Billie said it would be best if the group received the news from the sheriff himself, and by then we should have returned to pick up things at that point.

Still shaken by the dreadful scene we had witnessed, we arrived back at the clubhouse just as Sheriff Perkins was winding down in his presentation, shocked looks on the faces of everyone present. Em immediately took me aside, and while expressing my condolences over Red's death he was remarkably calm, suggesting that for him possibly the whole thing was not a total surprise. He asked me to again take charge of the meeting, and I warned him that providing a complete explanation of what happened would necessarily involve referring to some details of his family history that he might not want revealed. He assured me I was free to disclose anything needed to explain why Red acted as he did, otherwise there's no telling what wild rumors might circulate throughout the island community. I thanked him and I asked everyone to take their seats again while fresh coffee arrived from the kitchen.

Looking at the group I detected a wide range of reactions, from the overt hostility of the Trostles to Trish Holifield's puzzled stare. Figuring the end was as good a place as any to start, I first gave a brief account of the tragic events on the tower and then tried to tie the loose ends together.

"I know you are all curious about what has happened, the details of which I will share with you shortly. But first I would like to say that while I had known Red but a short time, he was my friend, to

the point the one and only time I played golf with him he shared with me his family history. From time to time I will refer to this, and I want to make it plain it was as viewed through his eyes, which is extremely important in explaining why he acted as he did.

“From the very beginning the first crime, the undertaker, was designed to set up the third as also a random attack without a specific victim in mind. Just before he went to his death, Red admitted he intended to frighten or at worst injure his first victim. I’m not excusing his actions, but in retrospect he never intended to kill him. His target all along was not one person, but two: Emlyn and Sylvia Jones. One of his objectives was monetary—the considerable estate he would inherit—but I suspect this was secondary to the deep seated resentment he felt toward not only his brother and his life in general, but also toward his father, Emlyn Jones, Senior. He told me when the present Mr. Jones was born it was at the height of World War Two, and his return home was a supremely happy event. However, Red arrived during the dark days of Viet Nam, unexpectedly born late in life to what he saw as a troubled mother and an over-achieving, driven father who had little time for him. Add to this his mother’s possible suicide, followed by his father making a will effectively disinheriting him. Now, Paradise Cay itself loomed far more prominently in Red’s mind, seeing it as a memorial to the father you, Mr. Jones, idolized, the man he hated…”

My boss was quick to interrupt. “But, that’s preposterous! The perpetuation of the Jones family legend has nothing to do with my personal feelings. It was started by my father himself, and I continued it as a matter of dollars and cents. It’s an image that’s easy to sell, and it’s paid off.”

“That may be the case. But you have to see things from your brother’s perspective to understand what motivated him to plan this complex series of crimes. Looking back the clues were there, but Mona was the only one to put them all together. It all started with Dr. Karyl. Red could have met Karyl any number of ways, like

when he needed help with his computer, or perhaps when Karyl was still providing services to the corporation. Assuming the two established some sort of rapport it probably didn't take Red long to figure out the good doctor had a lot to hide. In all of this the key question is how did Red learn that Karyl had the explosive. Perhaps their illegal activities started when Red stole supplies for him from the electrical shop, something I should have looked into and didn't. But, I did recall an entry in the security log last July concerning an explosion that took place in the south end of the island at the end of the Millionaire's Road extension, not far from where Red housed his dogs. I'm assuming that's where the explosive was tested. In any event, Red accumulated enough leverage to force Karyl to supply him with the explosive. Any criminal use Karyl knew would lead to him and with the law enforcement presence building up on the island it was clearly time for Karyl's alter ego, Glass, to move on.

"What made it so hard to make sense out of the situation was even though the murder of his brother and his wife was his ultimate objective, the two crimes were planned independently. Having set the stage with the first crime, Red then waited for the right time to complete his plan. He decided Gator Wilson's visit and the mixed couples tournament in the morning provided him the perfect opportunity. This revolved around creating as much confusion as possible while at the same time he had prepared an alibi from late afternoon the preceding day until after the murder. He'd booby-trapped the fatal cart the preceding afternoon when he returned his own cart to the shed, assuming that Dave would assign cart 61 to Em and Sylvia for their morning round in the couples blitz the following day. But, imagine his shock when he learned at dinner that Dave would take his brother's place on the next day. He had to do something, and fast! Not having a key to the cart shed his only hope was to take the booby-trapped cart out of the rotation, allowing him to return later that morning and remove the explosive and then await another opportunity to capitalize on the randomness of the first two crimes. So with the cart roster in the pro shop he made the change —"

It remained for Sheriff Perkins, keenly following my remarks, to interrupt. “You’ve done a great job so far. But, don’t keep us in suspense any longer. How did Red establish his airtight alibi?” An undercurrent of conversation told me others shared the sheriff’s interest.

“I’m coming to that. Mona gets credit for this one. Red’s movements were verified that night to the point the dinner hour remained the only possibility. But, both Mr. Jones and his wife swore they were with him all the time at dinner and that he didn’t leave, not even to go to the rest room. But he must have! I didn’t see the light until Mona reminded me that every Sunday night at the Grill there’s the popular all-you-can-eat seafood buffet. And what happens at a buffet? This is not a sit-down dinner. The diners are expected to serve themselves, taking a new plate each time they visit the buffet line. Going back for seconds and waiting in line to serve oneself is so much part of a buffet that no one gives the coming and going a second thought. So what did Red do? Leaving for a second serving, he ducked out the side door, shielded from the Joneses at their corner table by others waiting in line, went down the short flight of stairs, and let himself into the pro shop. He then made the schedule changes to make sure the cart he had booby-trapped earlier that afternoon would at three p.m. be assigned to his brother and Gator Wilson, randomly assigning Sylvia and Dave another cart in the morning. This gave him several hours the following day to defuse the booby-trapped cart and await a better opportunity to carry out the last move in the desperate game he was playing. Remember, as fire chief he had a master key to all the corporate facilities, including the pro shop but not the cart shed. I timed it myself, he could have done the whole thing in two or three minutes maximum. And, if Daisy Shen hadn’t taken the wrong cart, his plan would have worked,” I concluded decisively.

Dr. Orwell timidly raised his hand. “Chief Adams, please tell us how you finally managed to get Mr. Jones to reveal himself as the criminal. What caused him to run?”

“I wanted to save that until last because I’m still scared stiff to think what would have happened had our plan not worked. Mona worked through the mechanics of the crimes for me, just as I did tonight. Even though her theory fit the facts, was there any way to prove it? So I decided to take the frightening gamble she suggested, which I recognized from my college major as an artful exercise in applied psychology. Hence, the subdued lighting and the futile attempts at solving the crimes, not challenging Red’s alibi until Fred makes his surprise appearance. There he is standing tall, the architect’s plans for the Grill projected on a giant screen behind him. Now, here’s when staging was critical. From this point on the whole presentation was designed to go one step at a time until Red’s alibi was no longer believable, the real question not whether Red would crack but *when* he would crack under pressure. When I asked Fred if he worked Sunday night, that’s when Red concluded we not only knew how he had created his airtight alibi, but we further had a witness who could discredit it. So, he took off rather than waiting for the rest of the planned dialogue: ‘And, tell us what you observed that night when you were waiting at the bar for a drink order?’ ‘Well, sir, I had a perfect view of the stairs coming up from the ground floor.’ ‘And, what did you see?’ ‘I saw someone come up the stairs and then join the end of the buffet line.’ ‘And, is that person here tonight?’ There’s no need to continue....I’m sure you all get the idea.”

“But why was this such a big deal?” Sheriff Perkins interjected. “Any good investigator could have eventually reached the same conclusion and found the witness who would have nailed him.”

“But the problem was—Fred didn’t see him at all!” I admitted, still shaken by what would have happened had the ploy not worked.

Conversation, slowly rising in volume engulfed the room only to stop when Fred stood up and asked in a quavering voice. “May I say something?” Without waiting for an answer, he continued, “When Mona contacted me, I was being honest in telling her even though I worked that night, I never saw Mr. Jones come up the

stairs. But, while I was waiting for you guys to call me tonight I guess it was being in the same place or something—I suddenly remembered. It didn't happen exactly the way you said, but I did see him. When I was waiting at the bar I actually saw him going *down* the outside stairs. I'm sure it was him, with that plaid jacket he wears and his red hair. It was real busy and I didn't think anything about it at the time, but that's what happened!" Fred stood there, clearly embarrassed by the commotion he had created. I thanked him and told him he could leave unless anyone had a question. No one did.

After things settled down Sgt. Greene was the next to speak. "Looking back, Charley, do you think Red believed he could get away with it? And, since his last attempt was a failure, do you think he would have tried again?"

"I've given these questions quite some thought. I was surprised at the meeting when Red gave away his prized dogs, high on the list of things he cared about the most. Now I understand, it was almost like he could see the end coming and he wanted to see they got good homes. Would he have tried again? I think not. In his final moments on the tower I detected genuine feelings of remorse for what he had done. If he hadn't given himself away I suspect nothing more would have happened and we would have been left with two unsolved murders on our hands, and me confronted with the dilemma of whether or not I should tell you, Em, about my suspicions."

"I agree with you," Mr. Jones said assertively. "Before we went to dinner Red as usual came to our house for cocktails, apparently an hour or so previously having booby-trapped the golf cart that he assumed the following morning would take both Sylvia and I to our deaths. I think that's when he got cold feet, uncharacteristically reminiscing about our family life and our parents. In the past we made an effort to avoid such discussions because they so often ended with hard feelings. Our basic disagreement was over our father and how very differently we viewed him and our family life

when we were growing up. I had everything, he had nothing; my life was happy, his was intolerable, that sort of thing. But, that night he talked at length about his childhood, nostalgically and completely out of character. I remember shaking his hand and telling him how much I enjoyed talking to him about the family and I'll never forget his final words. 'Em' he said, 'I wish we'd had this conversation a long time ago.' Remember, at the time he thought by his changing the cart schedule no one else was at risk, but because of a tragic mistake another innocent person died."

Struck with the irony in my boss's statement and emotionally drained, I adjourned the meeting. While the group was silently making their way out, I quietly pigeonholed my boss, his wife and Trish Holifield, asking them if they would mind staying a moment. Even though the case was officially closed, there was one more matter to be disposed of before bringing down the final curtain.

CHAPTER 36—THE FINAL CURTAIN

After the others had departed the room seemed eerily quiet, the electricity of the evening thoroughly dissipated. Mrs. Jones poured us fresh coffee, and realizing the ball was in my court I chose my words very carefully, directing my remarks to my boss.

"Mr. Jones, I want you to know I followed your mandate to fully investigate these crimes. I apologize for the assumptions I had to make along the way in an investigation that came so very close to home. I'm sure it was not easy for you, and I know it was very tough for me, but my only concern was protecting the interests of the corporation and the peace of mind of the residents. I hope I did not embarrass anyone by the fact that rumors had to be addressed because lives were at stake. Be assured beyond the facts I had to

reveal earlier, without your permission I will never mention anything else I learned: to anyone, at any time, for any reason."

"Charley," he said solemnly, "I appreciate all you have done and I trust you completely. I know exactly what you are referring to and I am glad you brought us together. With Red's death it's time for me to try to put together what's left of my family. I've been trying to think how to tell Sylvia, and I guess now is as good a time as any __"

"You don't have to Em," his wife interrupted, speaking softly, seeking to compose herself. "I know already...and I've wondered how I could tell you. Trish is your daughter and I think it's wonderful what you've done for her. But, I wish you'd told me, so you wouldn't have had to see her on the sly and have people thinking you were in the midst of a red-hot affair, like I did for a long time. I went along with it because I felt it was better than people knowing about your daughter. I even lied to Chief Adams when he questioned me. Maybe it's time you acknowledged her publicly, not in the newspaper but as kind of an open secret. I didn't realize what people were saying about us, and as far as me and that sleazy golf pro, I've only been trying to play better so you would be proud of me….Oh! Things are in such a mess...." On the verge of tears she buried her head in her hands, shoulders hunched as if trying to withdraw inside herself, overcome with emotion.

Trish rose from her chair to comfort her, taking the distraught woman's hands in her own, speaking slowly in a soft, clear voice. "I'm sorry. I realize now we should have told you. I grew up as the adopted child of an older couple who did everything for me, but I was always aware they weren't my real parents. However, they would never tell me anything about my birth, and I didn't know about public records. Besides, it was different then. If you were adopted, that was it! There was no way to find out anything about who your real parents were, you weren't even supposed to ask. So you can imagine how I felt when I was eighteen and Em, you showed up, telling me you were my father. So I did a terrible thing.

I gave you Em what I realize now was a highly exaggerated account of how mean my adoptive parents were and how terrible my home life was, conveniently forgetting to mention all the bad things I'd done, making out everything was their fault. I remember how shattered you were, Em, and when you promised you'd get me a place of my own, I jumped at it. I realize now it was a mistake to just pack up and leave and it got even tougher when I finally felt the need to settle down with the only real family I'd ever had. That's when you arranged for me to move, giving me a home in the subdivision. I realize why you can't acknowledge me as your daughter, and I genuinely appreciate the time we were able to spend together. This has also motivated me to make something of myself, and I have worked extra hard to pay you back for your kindness. In all of this I'll regret to my dying day there's no way I could make it up to the Holifields for the way I treated them. I realize now how important I must have been to those two middle-aged people who couldn't have children of their own. I'm just not a very nice person," she said sadly, face tilted to the light, reaching up to brush a luminous tear from the corner of her eye.

Em Jones broke the silence that followed by inquiring, "Charley. How did you ever find out about Trish and me?"

Embarrassed by his question, I answered uneasily, "Well, it all started with two sets of footprints in the storage room above my office and leading to some old personal files of yours. I know now one set of footprints was Sylvia's, the other Red's. They both went through the file cabinet, but for different reasons. Red was interested in the provisions of your will. Originally I thought Sylvia was, too, but then I realized she might have been interested in the same thing I was, a 1995 deed transferring a free and clear title to Trish's condo when she moved in. Thinking it might be relevant to the case I went to New Smyrna Beach where through a stroke of luck I tracked down the details of Trish's early life. Eventually I struck a dead end, or so it seemed, when I was led to believe her real father's name was Eddy Smith, with his address merely: Providence, Rhode Island. I didn't think anything of it until putting

my files back together I came across an old family photo used in a promotional brochure. I was able to date the picture because Red was a baby, interestingly nestled in your arms rather than your parents. And there you were, wearing a brown varsity football jersey. Suddenly it all came together: Ivy League. Football. Brown sweater! It didn't take me long to translate: Eddy for Emlyn; Smith for Jones; Providence, Rhode Island, home of Brown University. What else but a rich kid on senior break in Florida, and a young, impressionable country girl captivated by college boys. Under such circumstances, who would have given their right name?"

"I'm not proud of it," Mr. Jones admitted. "But, Sylvia, I'm curious. You said you already knew I was Trish's real father. Considering all the detective work Charley did, originally getting nowhere, how did you find out?"

"It was easy. In the same file as the deed I found a copy of Trish's birth certificate. Considering where it was filed, it didn't take me long to figure out who Eddy Smith really was. And, realizing how devastating it would be if it fell into the wrong hands, I destroyed it."

"In your position I wouldn't blame you," I said. "Of course, it's still on file as a matter of public record. The real irony is had he been successful Red would never have benefited from his crime. You see, under the provisions of your will, Mr. Jones, if both you and your wife were deceased then Trish would then have been next in line to inherit as your surviving lineal descendant. I don't know whether you planned it that way—"

"Of course I did," my boss interrupted. "I had discussed it with Trish. That was the reason for the odd phrasing of my will. Since we both wanted to keep her true parentage a private matter I couldn't name her directly. But if I'm considered as dying intestate, without a will, this still protects my wife and daughter without anyone being the wiser. I had further given Trish a letter acknowledging that I was her father. Under Florida law this is one way an illegitimate child can be recognized and inherit as a lineal

descendant. The will I plan to draft tomorrow will correct all this and make it plain that I mean to take care of you both. You're the only family I've got now...." he said, eyes misting over and looking toward the two women.

When I asked if there were any more questions, after a brief pause Trish broke the silence. "Chief Adams. Your investigation came up with the name my father used so many years ago. Tell me. How did you find out?"

"Sure," I replied. "It was written on a piece of paper your adoptive mother found in your room after you left. She's kept it all these years, I suspect because she hoped she might see you again."

"You mean...she's still alive?" she asked incredulously.

"As of a week ago. She's ninety-one years old, in a nursing home and her days are numbered. But, I'm guessing a visit from you would do more for her than all the doctors. By the way, before she talks to anyone she likes a description of their appearance. You see—she's blind. But, I'll bet in her mind's eye you won't look a day over eighteen."

Trish turned back to Sylvia and they started talking, slowly at first, and then with more animation. Mr. Jones, lips pursed sat silently staring at the reflected highlights in the polished table. Wordlessly, I assembled the contents of my file folder and left, closing the door quietly behind me.

I got the distinct impression they wanted to be left alone.

EPILOGUE

In the years that followed things on the island had quieted down considerably. Staring now at the darkened television set I thought the day would pass quicker if my office were a little busier. Not that I wanted to return to the frantic days of the Mad Bomber investigation, but something a little more challenging than domestic disputes and locked automobiles would be distinctly welcome. My mind going back to when Paradise Cay was featured nightly on the evening news I thought about the changes the highly publicized case had made in so many persons' lives.

The morning after the monumental meeting ending the case, golf pro Dave Williams didn't report for work. His apartment phone disconnected, it was apparent he had pulled up stakes and left town. I later heard he was working as head pro at a municipal course on the Gulf coast catering primarily to the needs of retired citizens from the mobile home community across the street. He may have downgraded his expectations, but I suspect he's still on the lookout for the big score, just around the corner.

Cecelia Wentworth seemed to take Red's death the hardest—for one week—spending a lot of time in her office, her eyes red from

crying. Then, she showed up at work as cheerful as ever, like nothing had happened. A month later she turned in her notice, announcing she had accepted the position of assistant food and beverage manager at a big beachfront hotel in Hawaii. No one has heard from her since.

Gloria Myers never returned to the island. The entire contents of her home were auctioned off in one of the largest estate sales in the island's history. Mel bought the small Chinese scroll that Phil displayed on the wall of his study. We took it to a dealer to have it appraised. He said it was a copy of an ancient Chinese love calligraphy scroll with two lines from the famous poem 'May we Live Long Enough,' to which someone had added an inscription in contemporary characters that translated as "One joy scatters a hundred griefs." Mel and I looked at each other. We had finally learned why Gloria was so sure that Phil couldn't have been responsible for Daisy's death. Two months later we received an announcement of her marriage, with a brief note saying the groom was a widower she had known for years. We haven't heard from her since.

I was caught in the fallout from the case when Mona dropped her bombshell! She was leaving, having been accepted in the next class for the state police academy. Much as she welcomed the close informality of our working relationship, she felt she had to get into *real* law enforcement. She graduated at the top of her class and I saw her as recently as last week pulled off on the shoulder of I-95, the flashing lights of her brown and yellow chase car announcing to the world she was writing a speeding ticket for the recalcitrant owner of a shiny new silver Mercedes with Ohio plates.

Sgt. Greene is still with the Sheriff's department. After the case she was promoted to lieutenant and reassigned full time to the criminal investigation division. We see each other from time to time at departmental meetings and last week she outscored me on the range when we were qualifying on our weapons. For a while she and agent Drummond were interested in each other, but nothing

came of it. I also heard she is now dating another agent from the Jacksonville office that she visits on weekends.

I see Elf now and again at the golf course. I played nine holes with her one afternoon and from Mel's reaction at dinner I decided I might be better off in the future if I limited my practice rounds to members of the senior blitz. We still have coffee now and then after the staff meeting, swapping island gossip. Occasionally I bump into her in the parking lot when she's got a couple of marks in tow: "The only selling around here is done by…" In the words of the immortal Yogi, "Déjà vu all over again!"

Dr. Onslow Orwell is still bringing dead electronic devices back to life. Recently he has been making house calls to a retired lady professor whose computer seems to have more than its fair share of problems. She seems nice and we've had them over to dinner a couple of times. She's an officer in the Senior Travel Club and they go on all the trips together. I'm still not sure whether he knows the impact the Jones family had on his life, but I'm not going to make any attempt to find out.

Mr. Jones is still CEO of the corporation. He wasn't in evidence much for a month after the tragedy, canceling his staff meetings. I was surprised one day to get a call inviting me to lunch in his private dining room where after expressing his gratitude for all I had done he pushed across the table a check for ten thousand dollars. This he explained was the reward he had offered for apprehension of the perpetrator of the crimes. Going home, after a brief consultation with Mel I wrote a check for half and slipped it into the mail addressed to Mona together with a thank you note.

Speaking of thank you notes, I received one from Sylvia Jones, sent to the office and marked "Personal." She thanked me for helping breathe new life into her marriage and for going out on a limb to restore peace and order to the island community. She and her husband have been squeezing in nine holes late in the afternoon, and they won the last couples tournament by ten strokes.

Trish Holifield still works at the front desk of the conference center. On occasion, she flies to Atlanta to visit some corporate type who supposedly holds several patents in the computer industry. She's also a regular visitor at her father's home and it's not uncommon to see them shopping together in the Upper Village. Her relationship to Mr. Jones is well known, but no longer a hot conversational topic. She's widely referred to in the community as "that woman."

Sheriff Perkins finally bit the dust. Not that he hadn't done a good job, but in the frenzied aftermath of nine-eleven I guess the voters simply wanted a change. Accepting a community affairs position with the state's Department of Law Enforcement, in his first public presentation to the Tallahassee Rotary Club he made the mistake of livening it up with examples of obscure laws still on the books. He cited an ordinance that he said could be interpreted as prohibiting Florida State University's mascot, Renegade, from galloping around the football field after the home team scored. Not only did the service club members fail to appreciate the humor in his remarks, but the organization's president sent a letter to the editor highly critical of his presentation. Last I heard, the former sheriff was considering a career change.

Fred has worked his way up to dining room manager of the Grill. Recently, decked out in his tastefully tailored coral sports jacket with turquoise trim, he told me he was into day trading on the internet and he had just bought a brand new pickup truck with cash generated from the twenty-five hundred dollars Em had given him for the key role he played in the investigation. He said I should seriously consider getting on board as long as the present undervaluation of the market continued. I told him I'd think about it.

Not long ago the island was buzzing with the news that Tara Trostle had run off with the bread man and the maroon SUV, leaving the kids in her husband's custody. A year later Wink severed his relationship with Mr. Jones and moved in with his aged

parents in Key West. Last I heard the arrangement wasn't working out. Nothing has ever been heard from the volatile Tara, however, considerable improvement has been noted in the baked goods section of the Island Supermarket.

The car stolen by Karyl-Glass was found two weeks later by San Diego police, abandoned in the parking lot of the Hotel del Coronado. Two months after that the missing man's body was recovered from the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon, his appearance altered so as to make him unrecognizable, the coroner's report confirming drowning as the cause of death. Identified from fingerprints, he had less than ten dollars on his person, apparently the sum total of his worldly assets.

Mel is happy now in her job working in the new branch of the county library on the mainland. A week after we closed the case, she introduced me to bridge, and we play now and then with a couple from down the street. I don't have much trouble with the point count and the suits, but I'm still a little worried about the bidding. Most important, her progress in golf is remarkable. She may not hit the ball long, but she's in the middle of the fairway almost all the time. Plus, she's deadly at chipping and putting. I come home for lunch quite often and we have been making day trips on weekends to become better acquainted with our home state. And, lest I forget, last week she talked me into taking in a six month-old Persian youth cat from the animal shelter on the mainland. We haven't named it yet but looking around the condo I'm ready to suggest "Trouble."

As for me, the job is a piece of cake now. I play golf twice a week in the blitzes and on occasion with Mel after work. Sometimes when I tee off my thoughts go back to the first and only time I played with Red, watching his ball take flight—long and straight into the bright blue sky. I still relate to him as someone in many ways very much like me, the other warped side to his personality I glimpsed but briefly I'll never understand. As a friend I wished I had correctly read the signs of his inner turmoil to the point that

something could have been done before it was too late. Wanting something more in life before it's too late for me, I've turned the television off. My computer boots up and I start to type:

"The two women thrashed around on the slick floor…"

THE END